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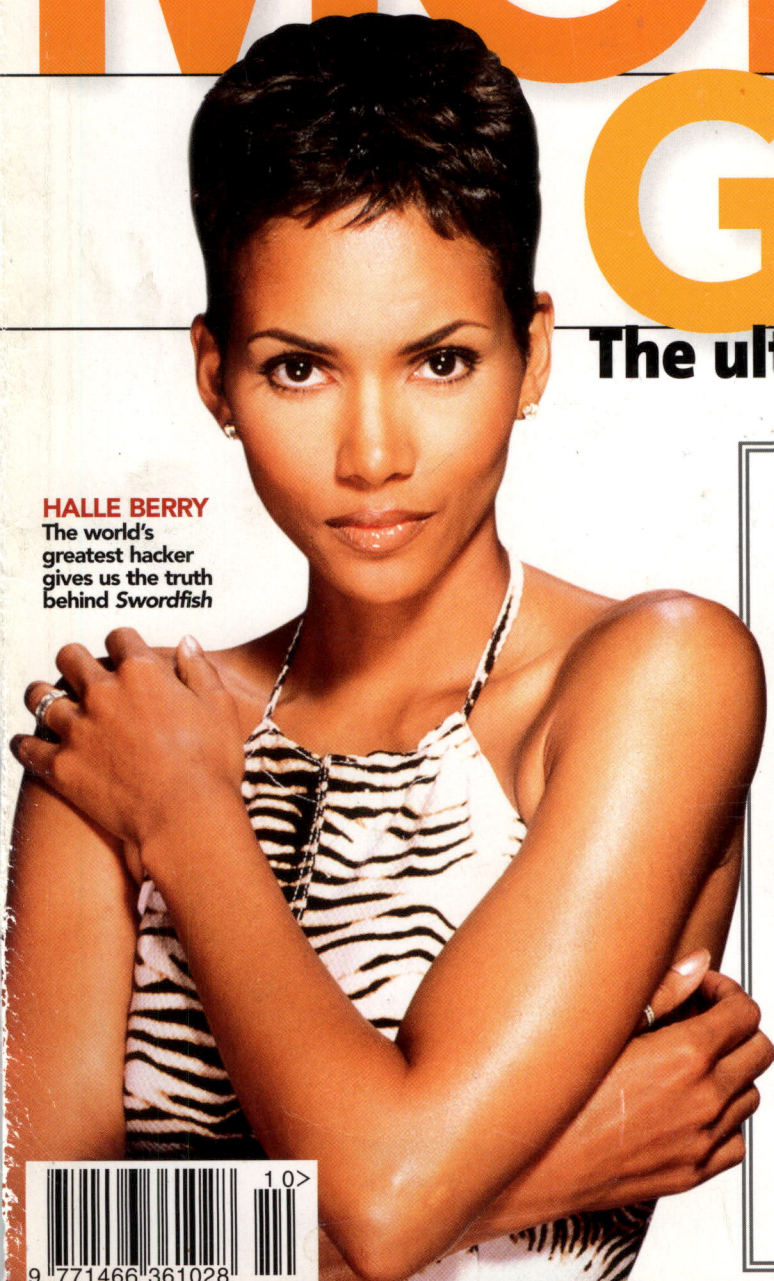

HALLE BERRY
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REVEALED

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The truth about where everyone else is surfing

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ESSENTIALS

ABOUT US»

We're sworn to saving you time and money by bringing you the best of the Internet every month – and giving technical advice that will make mastering the Net cheaper and easier.

CONTACT US»

GROUP EDITOR Mark Payton
mark.payton@haynet.com
EDITOR Robert Jeffery
robert.jeffery@haynet.com
PRODUCTION EDITOR
Gary Parkinson
gary.parkinson@haynet.com
STAFF WRITER Alex Newby
alex.newby@haynet.com
TECHNICAL EDITOR
Daniel Grabham
daniel.grabham@haynet.com
ART EDITOR Anthony Moore
anthony.moore@haynet.com
PICTURE EDITOR
Richard Lawrence
richard.lawrence@haynet.com

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LIVE 2001»

the net staff will be on hand at Live 2001, the UK's biggest consumer electronics show, at Birmingham NEC on 21-23 Sep. See p72 for more details or call 0870 902 0444 for tickets.

NEED HELP?»

Got a technical query? Call *the net* helpline on 020 8267 5933 between 2pm and 5pm each Thursday for one-on-one advice, or email ***thenetnow@haynet.com***.

TO ADVERTISE»

AD MANAGER John Burke
john.burke@haynet.com
CLASSIFIED SALES Gurbir Phull
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COVER PIC: COLORIFIC

:-) ED'S COMMENT

Time to to take pleasure in the simpler things...

'What does E.T. stand for?' 'Cos he hasn't got a chair...'

Not, as you might have thought, a reject from *An Audience With Joe Pasquale* but a recent Joke Of The Week on one of the Web's 'premier' comedy sites, which shall remain nameless lest it be encouraged. To be fair, it was one of the funnier ones on the site.

While good comedy depends upon the humour of the beholder, one of the most frequent gripes we hear from Internet newcomers is: 'Where's the funny stuff?' They've got a point: the Web has revolutionised countless aspects of everyday life, but for belly laughs you'd have more joy with a copy of the *Yellow Pages*.

Satire, of course, is an entirely different matter (just ask Chris Morris) – from the knowing social commentary of The Onion (***www.theonion.com***) to the frequently venomous humour of TV Go Home (***www.tvgohome.com***) and its spin-off sister site Unnovations (***www.unnovations.com***), carefully-constructed pastiches have flourished online. But sheer hilarity is largely restricted to the odd circular email. The really funny stuff has obviously eluded us (though we eagerly await your suggestions at the usual address).

It's not all doom and gloom, though: there's plenty to gladden the heart online, and our main source of pleasure this month has been the pursuit of money (p30). As you'll see, with the Net's help, keeping a tighter rein on your finances, dabbling in the stock market, making investments and getting sound, reliable fiscal advice no longer requires a degree in economics.

It's not likely to keep you chortling into the small hours, it's true, but it might just make everyday life a little less painful. And with a bit of luck (drum roll...) you could be laughing all the way to the bank.

Robert Jeffery, **EDITOR**
robert.jeffery@haynet.com

thismonth»

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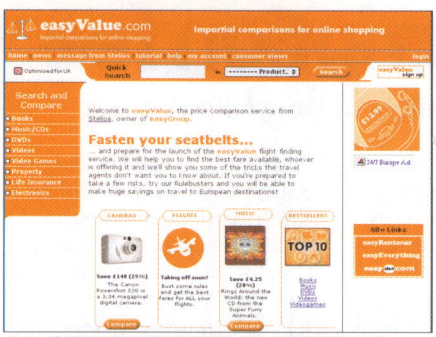

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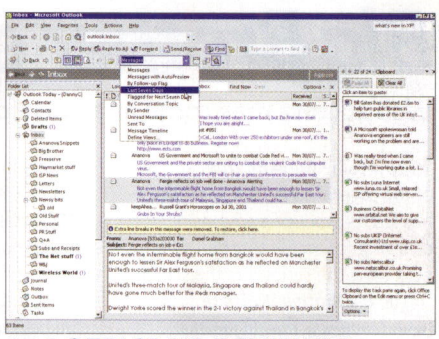

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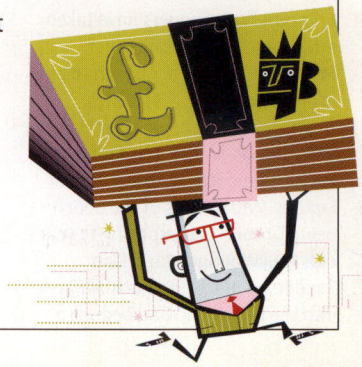


Next year's *Big Brother* might cost you

Big Brother considers subscription fee

Web success may come at a price for surfers from next year – and other premium sites are following suit

The overwhelming Internet success of the second series of *Big Brother* has led its producers to consider charging for access to video streams next time the series hits the screen.

The *Big Brother* Web site (***www.channel4.com/bigbrother***) attracted a huge 1.2 million unique users during the second series, which ended in late July. But the producers and accountants will be taking more note of the number of streams served up by the site – more than 16 million – as the voyeuristic public logged on to watch Helen and Paul's developing romance. It's thought that streaming may soon become a premium service available at a cost.

Andrew Gumbridge, managing editor of Channel 4 Interactive (***www.channel4.com***), says 'I certainly wouldn't rule it out. We would want to do it in a special, new way... there's so much great stuff on the Web available for free, but it has to make money in the future.'

He shares the attitude of many industry bods who are beginning to demand a return on the huge investments made in Internet technology. Gumbridge says he would 'like to see some experimentation' with streaming fees.

There has already been some 'experimentation': MSN charged as much as £10 for pay-per-view of a recent Elton John gig. The company attracted millions for last year's Madonna Webcast – but without any direct financial return.

Chris Short, head of new media at Big Brother's production company Endemol, said that this series of *Big Brother* hadn't been about monetising the brand, but instead had been about 'getting out there' as much as possible – 'it's a cross-platform project.' For example, the WAP site didn't make money, but was another way in which fans could 'get involved with *BB* 24 hours a day'.

Short warned that this was likely to change – the US *Big Brother* (***www.cbs.com/primetime/ bigbrother***) already charges for content through GoldPass (***www.goldpass.com***), Real's subscription service.

Channel 4 isn't alone in contemplating charging for premium content. Newspapers are hoping to recoup the huge outlays they have ploughed into their complex online operations. Major players like *The Telegraph* (***www.telegraph.co.uk***) and *The Times* (***www.thetimes.co.uk***) have considered bringing in charges for certain services such as crosswords, although any moves in this direction have been temporarily derailed by the demise of the European arm of Qpass (***www.qpass.com***), an online payment company which was already in talks with *The Telegraph*.

Though unpopular, the subscription model has been proven to work on the odd occasion. *The Wall Street Journal* (***www.wsj.com***) in the US has already made a success of charging for content. A subscription costs $59 (about £41) per year, and the site has

Kids phone Bill from his cyberbench

Enterprising teenagers have taken advantage of the world's first Internet-enabled park bench to plug in a phone and ring Bill Gates.

The cyberbench, unveiled in Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, has four sockets where people can plug in their laptops. Within days of the bench being unveiled, enterprising 17-year olds Neil Woodman and Dan Sanderson plugged a normal phone into the bench and had begun to make calls. They even called Bill Gates, but only got as far as his secretary. Bill-payers MSN (***www.msn.co.uk***) laughed off the prank off as 'all good fun', but said that national, mobile and international calls would quickly be barred as originally planned.

According to an MSN spokesperson, the town was chosen partly because it was the location for the signing of the Magna Carta: '[the charter] resonates with the Internet which is the most significant communication tool in history.'

Cyberbench: for restful logging-on

It might sound like a complicated piece of kit, but in fact the bench simply has sockets where people can plug in their laptops (or, in this case, phones). Four people at a time can plug in to the bench, which is free to use. The bench, located in the gardens of Bury St Edmunds' 11th-century abbey, is on a three-month trial. Mind you, judging by the rather flimsy-looking way in which the bench is bolted to the ground, there's no guarantee it'll still be there by then...

PICTURES: CHANNEL 4

more than half a million subscribers. There is, however, widespread scepticism that such a system would work this side of the Atlantic – for one thing, unlike the British, American readers often subscribe to their daily newspapers in much the same way as you could subscribe to this magazine.

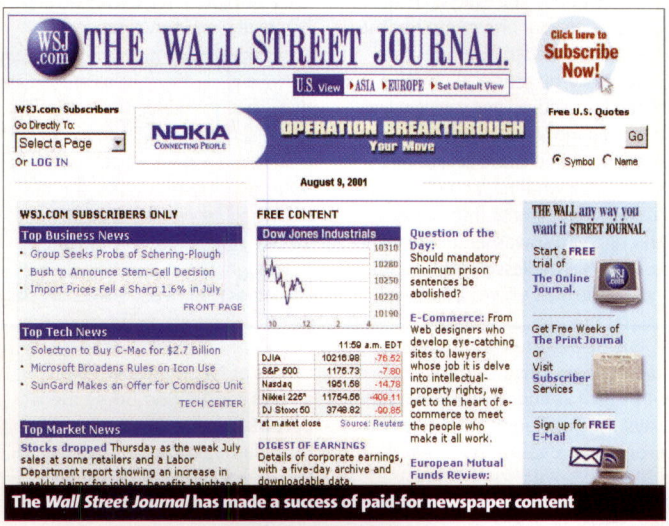
One of the things newspapers could begin to charge for is research through their archives, but recent experiments have been less than a resounding success. The *Financial Times* (***www.ft.com***) had to scrap its charges for advanced searches after it was discovered that people were simply using the less advanced free service. However, newspapers are taking the view that they have to recoup their investment somehow; a few years ago, researchers would have had to buy a CD-Rom of back issues. Recently, they've been able to search on the Net.

The main problem is deciding what people are prepared to pay for – what is premium content? *The New York Times* (***www.nytimes.com***) currently offers a successful crossword subscription service and *The Times* is planning a similar service for £10. But is this really the stuff of premium content?

Industry bods are starting to demand a return on their investments

Victoria Beckham's new Web site at ***www.victoriabeckham.mu*** has started to use paid-for content through a system of payment cards, available for £3 from 20,000 stores. The market clearly seems to exist – for this type of content at least. As an alternative to buying a payment card, users could phone a line charged at £1.50 per minute to get a pass code. Sound too steep? The phone line generated 1,000 calls in just six days.

As Gumbridge says, 'the main problem is the multitude of different ways people can be charged.' The way forward is probably to use existing price structures – such as phone bills as used by the Beckhams.



The *Wall Street Journal* has made a success of paid-for newspaper content

Stressed by the Web?

the net helpline is available for all software, hardware, ISP and technical enquiries. Lines are open on Thursdays from 2pm to 5pm.

020 8267 5933

or email thenetnow@haynet.com

NEWS IN BRIEF

FIRST BYTES»

› A NAME BRAND

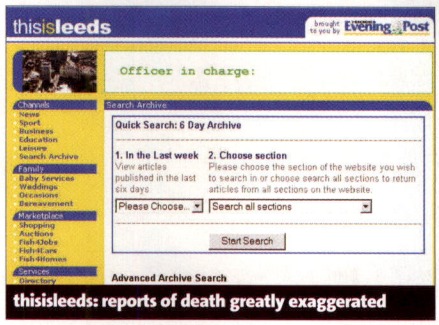
Canadian businessman A R Mani has been told at a World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) hearing that he can continue to use the domain name *www.armani.com*. The Swiss company which owns the trademarks of the famous Armani fashion house had tried to claim that it had the right to the domain name. Lawyers acting for the fashion giant claimed that Mr Mani has been misusing the Armani name but the claims were rejected – Mani has been in business as a graphic artist under the A R Mani name since 1981.

› STILL ALIVE AND KICKING

The Web site of a Yorkshire newspaper mistakenly published an obituary of the Queen Mother just days before she celebrated her 101st birthday. The *Yorkshire Evening Post* site (***www.thisisleeds.co.uk***) thankfully spared even more blushes by not putting the stories on the front page of the site but did manage to put 10 stories into the archive, including an article speculating on the reaction of the royal family. The articles cropped up in search results on the site.

› VOTE FOR YOUR TOP CD STORE

The net **has teamed up with the UK Online Music Awards 2001 to let you vote for your top online music retailer – and win £200 of CD vouchers into the bargain. The awards are held at Ocean, Hackney, London, on 27 September and we're sponsoring the top music retailer gong. To vote, and enter the prize draw, just choose from the nominated stores – 101CD.com, Amazon.co.uk, Audiostreet.com, Groovetech.com, Hmv.co.uk and pure-groove.co.uk – and email your vote to *prizes@ukonlinemusicawards.com*.**



thisisleeds: reports of death greatly exaggerated

› SIC OF TXT MSGS

Genie has launched a new site to help the growing band of text messaging – sorry, txt msging – addicts. The ***www.txtclinic.com*** site offers a 'txt calculator' so you can work out exactly how much your habit is costing. There's a selection of case studies from 'reformed addicts' plus a frankly bizarre notice board for texting-related anecdotes and information.

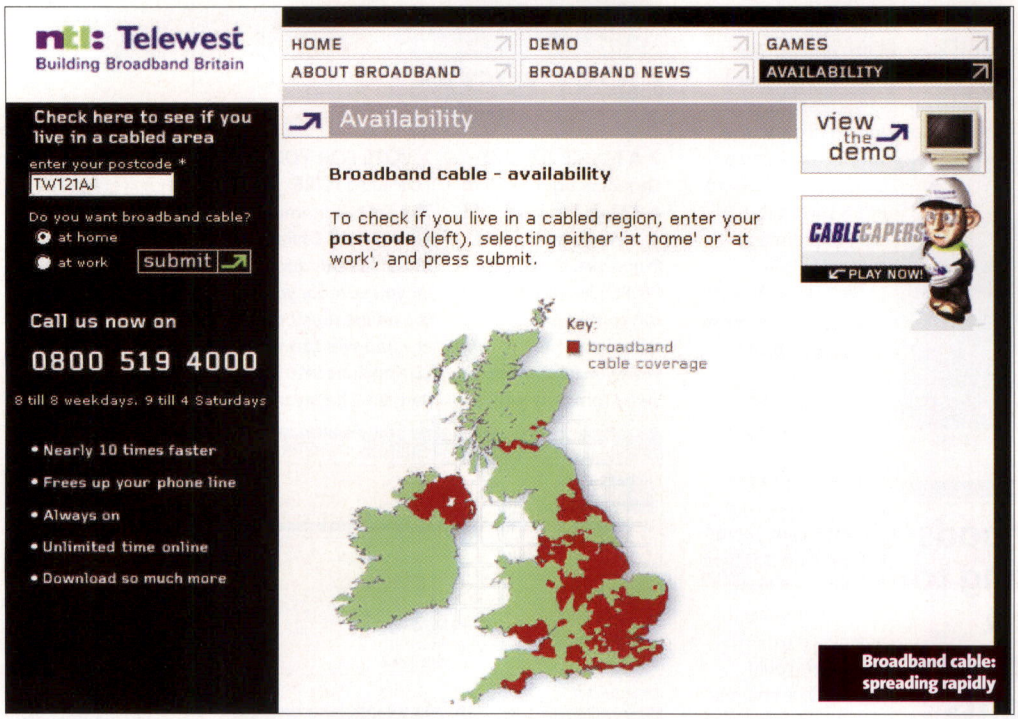
The Txt Clinic: mending poorly thumbs worldwide

› IF ONLY IT WAS TONY...

Thais who aren't happy with the performance of their Prime Minister can now email him and tell him. The PM, Thaksin Shinawatra, thought up the idea whereby members of the public email through a Government site with suggestions, praise or criticism of his regime. Strangest of all is the name of the initiative: 'Bell of Concern from the Prime Minister's Heart'.

› DON'T GO TO COLORADO

Colorado's Bureau of Investigation is having to work overtime putting pictures and details of dozens of sex offenders online after a new emergency state law was passed. Governor Bill Owens made the law after 74 convicted sex offenders were released across the state; they were originally convicted because of a flawed 1993 statute and so their convictions were rendered void and they were set free.



Broadband cable: spreading rapidly

Big players team up to promote broadband cable

It's broadband on the run as cable giants team up

Britain's two biggest cable firms, Telewest and ntl, have gone into partnership to promote 'always-on' cable Web access. The companies have also launched a joint Web site at ***www.broadband-cable.co.uk*** with packages from £24.99 per month.

The tie-in might seem unusual, but the companies cover different geographical areas and so a tie-up seemed logical, as Bill Goodland, director of Internet at ntl explains: 'It makes sense; Telewest are our long-lost cousins really...'

Broadband cable is currently available across 37 percent of the UK in nine million homes. Fergal Butler, head of strategy at Telewest, says the main problem the companies face is getting the message across: 'it's [telling the public] that broadband cable is "always on", that it won't clog up your phone line.'

Broadband cable works via a dedicated connection separate from your telephone line – all you need to do is fire up your browser to use the Net; there's no dial-up. Butler compares a dial-up connection with a water hand pump and says 'getting a broadband connection will be just like when people first got running water. Look what happened, it revolutionised the home from showers through to dishwashers... [the technology] has endless possibities. It's not futuristic, it's here and now.'

Pay bills at your online Post Office

Consignia is set to launch a service enabling customers to pay bills without having to leave their PC. The company, formerly known as Post Office Counters, intends to make the service a 'one stop shop' for bill payments.

Jim Pang, Consignia's director of electronic services calls it offering '...customers another choice for how they view, pay and store their bills'. The company currently has 28 million people visiting its Post Offices each week. Net-enabled customers will be able to pay their bills at any time using the new service, imaginatively called 'Bills Online'.

As with the usual Post Office counter, the new service will accept bills from banks and credit card companies as well as utility bills, depending on whether you've signed up to the service. The bill issuers will be charged per bill dealt with, as well as an initial set-up fee. The site's technology will be licensed to bill issuers so they can have payment facilities on their own sites.

As with online banking, however, the service does raise fears over the future of rural branch services.

Postman Pat: a thing of the past?

Code Red: was virus panic a red herring?

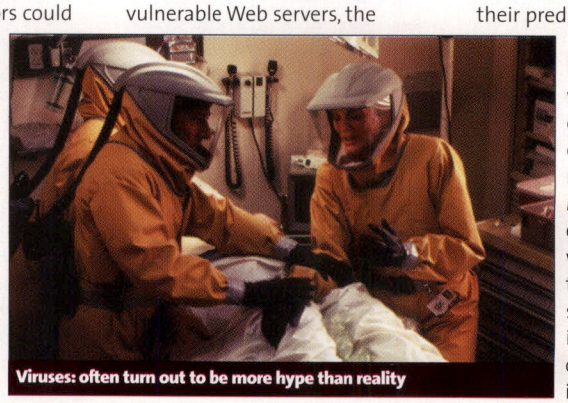
The Code Red 'worm' virus turned out to be more about hype than a real threat to society following this month's media scare.

Home operating systems such as Windows 95, 98 and Me were unaffected – the virus-like 'worm' inhabited Internet servers and machines operating Windows NT and Windows 2000 and couldn't be easily detected. The worm worked by exploiting a loophole causing computers to flood US Government Web sites with spurious information. It also defaced sites with the words 'Hacked by Chinese', reported the papers.

Network administrators could protect themselves against Code Red by downloading a simple patch – effectively a computer vaccination from Microsoft.

Much of the hype came from the FBI and some e-security companies who sent out warnings about an 'Internet slowdown' as if there was no tomorrow.

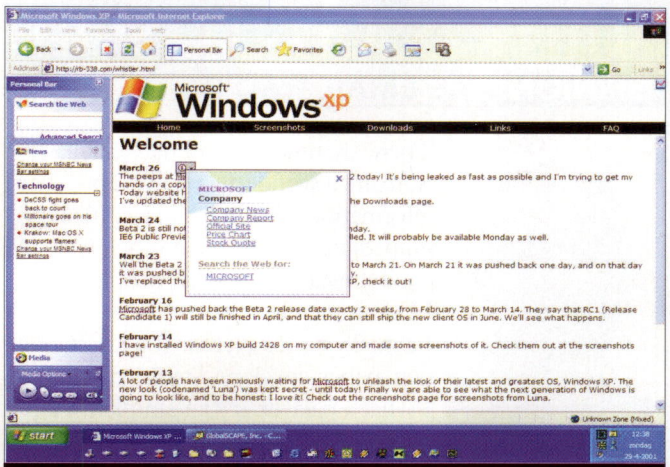
Graham Cluley, senior technology consultant for anti-virus firm Sophos (***www.sophos.com***) says that 'although the Code Red worms were a serious threat to vulnerable Web servers, the claims of Net meltdown were always codswallop. Some members of the security community have damaged the industry with their predictions of doom.'


Viruses: often turn out to be more hype than reality

Although some Internet connections were slow in the US, only one British company (in Luton) reported a problem. Microsoft was left with egg on its face, though, when it was revealed that some Hotmail servers had become infected because its own patch was not installed.

PICTURES: KOBAL, CORBIS, WOODLAND ANIMATION

IE6 available to surfers at last



A beta version of IE6 running on Windows XP: note now-defunct Personal Bar

The latest incarnation of Internet Explorer, version 6, is now available to download from Microsoft's site

The software has been in its beta 'testing' phase for some time, but Microsoft has now responded to consumer feedback and has axed planned features including the much-feted smart tags that make Office XP more user friendly. The smart tags are would have underlined key phrases and provided links to related sites. While they wouldn't have been obtrusive, the tags were found to direct to Microsoft sites a little bit too much.

Also gone is the Personal Bar (as shown above) which was due to display news and other tailored content of interest as well as easy access to your Contacts. The pic above shows IE6 running on Windows XP: download IE6 from ***www.microsoft.com/windows/ie***.

It beats getting a pogo stick in your stocking...

A new hand-held gadget to be launched at the end of the year will provide completely wireless full Internet access and email on the move. The device, basically a hybrid of a mobile phone and a PDA, has been developed by Pogo (***www.pogo-tech.com***), and will operate using existing GSM networks. It will be GPRS-ready and is set to retail in the region of £150-£200, although the cost will depend on the operator you sign up with.

Pogo has also signed a deal with Maporama (***www.maporama.co.uk***) to provide maps and other content specifically tailored to the location you specify – the site has over 50,000 detailed street maps of Europe and North America.

The device will also boast a diary and SMS text messaging capabilities, too. The browser window will function in exactly the same way as a conventional browser, so you will be able to see the whole of a Web site in colour on the 3.8" screen.

Navigation is provided via the touch-screen. The Pogo will be released in time for Christmas.

The Pogo: magnifying glass an optional extra

KNOWHOW THE INSTANT EXPERT GUIDE

No.27: Video email

I've got it! It's where you attach a movie to an email and send it to one of your mates, isn't it?

Well, not exactly...

Come on then, spill the beans...

It allows one of your friends to open an email from you and 'see' a message from you – a 'video conference' via email, if you like. Anyone with email and a basic Webcam can send live video communications anywhere.

Video mail: handy for expats

Who's behind it?

It's an Australian company called elive2u (***www.elive2u.co.uk***). You can download a 30-day trial copy of the software by visiting the site. A full subscription will cost £40. It's available for both dial-up and broadband connections, although it might be preferable to have a higher speed connection for this type of thing.

But if I get an email from one of my friends with video in it, won't I need the special software as well?

No. All you'll need is your usual email program to receive the email. You don't need a plug-in or any other software. Video emails can even be received using Web-based email such as Hotmail. You'll only need the software if you want to send video email yourself. elive2u works by using HTML email – you'll need to have JavaScript turned on, too, but it's standard in most email programs, anyway.

How much does it cost to send a video mail?

The software uses your existing email account to actually send the email, so you'll have to pay for any ISP phone costs you might incur.

But what if I want to send an email to my Aunty Maud in the middle of Australia? Why is that at all relevant to me?

Well, she is 88 and sadly only has a low bandwidth connection, so she's unlikely to be able to open an email with a massive video in it. It's not entirely wasted. elive2u can also provide a 'live chat' panel within an email where you can communicate with a recipient in a standard Web chat. Is your Aunt into Web chat?

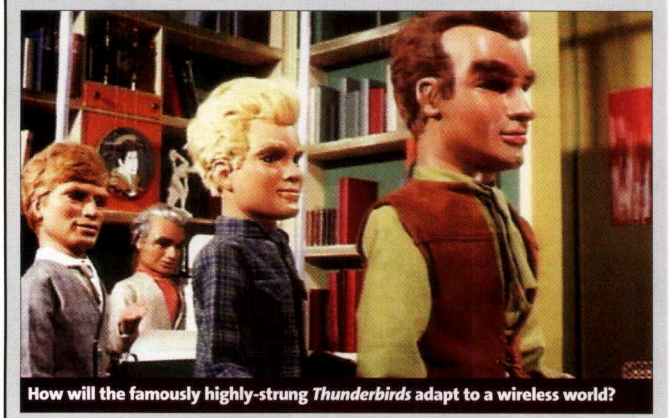
Er, no. Just one more question – why is it called elive2u.

Work it out...

thenetnow»

:// All that's happening online

WIRELESS WORLD»



How will the famously highly-strung *Thunderbirds* adapt to a wireless world?

Thunderbirds go WAP

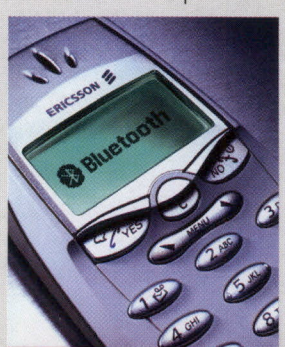
If you've ever fancied blasting off from Tracy Island then now's your chance – with a new *Thunderbirds* WAP game. SCi Entertainment has licensed the Thunderbirds brand for all gaming formats from the owners Carlton International.

'Thunderbirds is a very good brand to have as it appeals to people from seven to 70 years old,' said Mark Knutton of SCi Mobile Media.

The company will distribute the game across 21 network operators around the world ranging from the UK and Europe to the Far East and Latin America. WAP call revenues will be split between SCi and network operators. The game will launch later on this year; see ***www.sci.co.uk*** for details.

Bluetooth is a great improvement on existing wireless infrared technology as it doesn't need to be positioned correctly to work – your Bluetooth phone could be in your bag while you're connecting to the Net and the technology will work within a range of 10 metres.

Ericsson has already begun trialling Bluetooth in Japan. The experiments will include enabling people to buy train tickets and other goods such as groceries via their mobile phones. This works by electronically transferring money from phones to the seller's computer system. One hundred users are being loaned Bluetooth phones for the m-commerce test.



Ericsson: ready for Bluetooth

BLUETOOTH GEARS UP

Mobile Internet specialist Omnisky has teamed up with mobile phone giant Ericsson to offer email and Web access on the company's GPRS and Bluetooth products.

The two companies have already worked together to develop Bluetooth integration between Ericsson phones and Palm computers. This means that you'll be able to have 'always-on' Net access on your Palm handheld. The technology works through a chip for the Palm V or Vx which allows wireless Bluetooth connection with phones such as the new T39 (***www.ericsson.com/t39***) and R520.

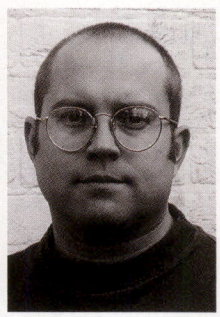
PALM SELLS MEMORY IDEAL

Palm and Panasonic have teamed up to try and convince the world that there is a standard for what they call 'interoperability among electronic devices' – in other words, making sure that future mobile and handheld devices will be able to share information via SD (Secure Digital) memory cards.

SD offers memory cards ideal for moving data between devices. The cards offer fast-access memory and are easy to carry (or lose) being around the size of a postage stamp. Panasonic already offers several SD products that can be seen at ***www.panasonic.com/sd***. Palm has sold 13 million handhelds.

Tim Richardson

OPINION HAS EMAIL HAD ITS DAY?



There are times when I hate email. Sure, it's a wonderful way to zip information around the place. It's fast, immediate and the main way I communicate with other people. I can't remember the last time I actually wrote a letter. You know, pen, paper, envelope, stamp, post box – what a palaver. It's far simpler to tap out a few words and press 'send'.

However, what happens when this main artery of correspondence is rendered useless? What then? Like many people I recently got hit by the SirCam worm – that nasty summer virus that clogged up inboxes with massive files of nonsense. The files were so big it slowed down the retrieval of everyday email to a snail's pace.

What happens when this main artery of conversation is rendered useless?

But worse was to come. When I returned to work after a two-week holiday, the SirCam problem was so bad I couldn't download all my emails. I had to make a decision. My service provider could have filtered out all the infected emails for me but I was regarded as a 'low priority'. They couldn't say when they would be able to do it. The alternative was to purge the lot and hope that nothing of real importance would be deleted.

So I opted for the latter. And yes, I was a little concerned about having to take such drastic action, but at the time it seemed the only way to get things back to normal. The way I saw it, some of it would have been junk email. Others would be infected files that had got me in this position in the first place. Other bits and pieces would simply no longer be relevant.

And then there's the rest. That unknown amount of correspondence that could have contained, well, who knows what? It might have seemed like a crazy thing to do but three weeks on no one's been in touch to say: 'Why haven't you replied to my email?'

Nor has anyone written to say 'Hey, why weren't you at that meeting/party/conference?'. I don't know how many emails I lost – a couple of hundred at least by my reckoning – but I try to comfort myself with the thought that if what people had sent was really that important, then they'd get in contact again, surely. Could it be that email actually isn't that essential to everyday life after all? Perish the thought...

paranoid

Statattack»

:// The Web in charts and graphs

The Napster bomb finally explodes

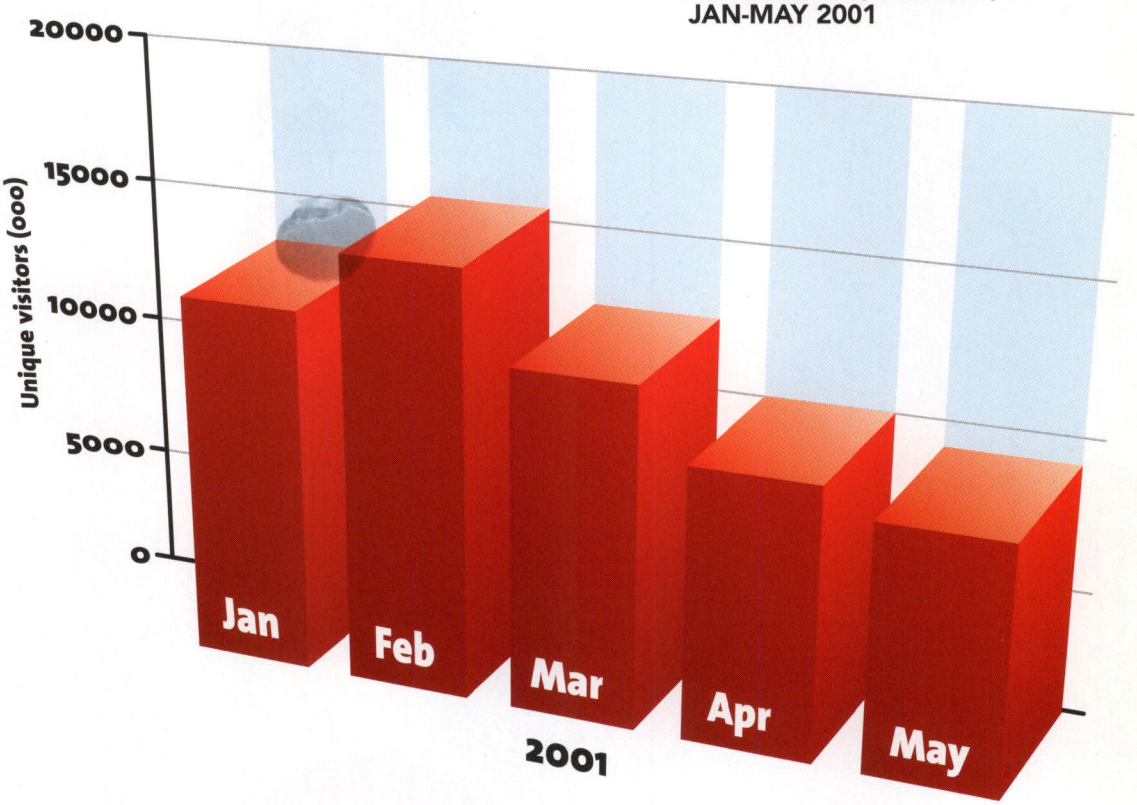
The Supreme Court ruling against Napster has cost the file-sharing service dear, according to the latest figures from JMM.

Users of Shawn Fanning's innovative music application have fallen from 13 million during January to 8.6 million in May, since the courts ordered Napster (***www.napster.com***) to remove all copyrighted material from its site.

The stats refer to the number of people using their Napster download to search for music and reflect a general downturn for the service which has seen thousands flocking to rival Audiogalaxy (***www.audiogalaxy.com***). The Napster home page continues to attract a massive number of visits, however, from users looking for the latest news on the service. At the time of going to press, Napster was offline, preparing for a relaunch which will see it go 'legit' by offering officially-sanctioned downloads for a yet-to-be-decided subscription fee, with royalties paid to the artists concerned. Naspster will be hoping this reverses the downward trend...

ILLUSTRATIONS: PETER LIDDIARD

NUMBER OF PEOPLE USING THE NAPSTER APPLICATION, IN 1000S, JAN-MAY 2001



Why speed is of the essence for satisfactory surfing

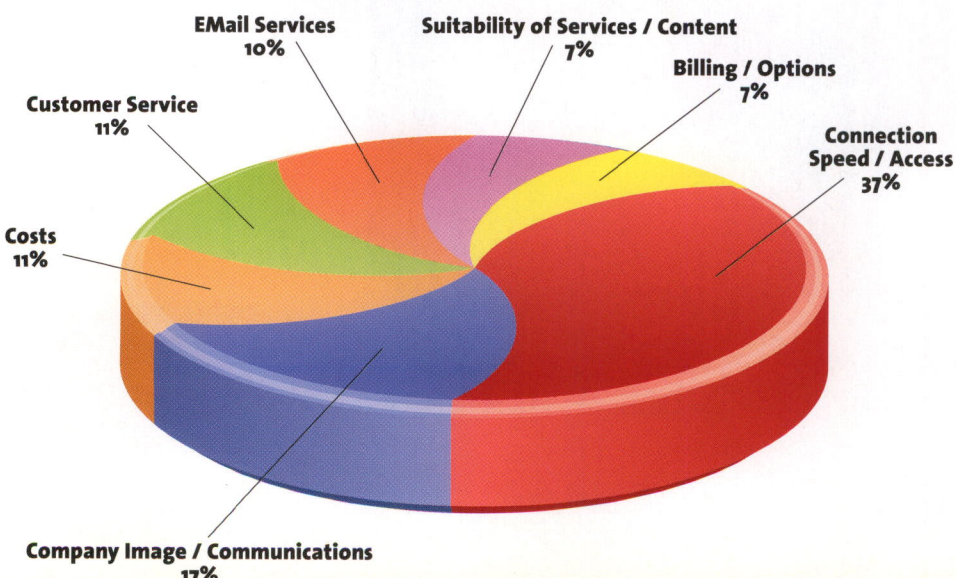
Connection speeds are the most important concern for UK ISP users, a new survey has revealed.

JD Power and Associates asked home users for the most important thing they looked for in an ISP – a massive 37 percent fingered the speed of their connection, more than double the number who thought a company's image or communications was top of the list.

Surprisingly, the cost of connection lay in third place on 11 percent, alongside customer service and ahead of email services (10 percent).

The same survey found AOL users were more satisfied with their ISP's performance than any others. NTL, LineOne and ic24 also performed above average, with the booby prize going to BTinternet.

WHAT BRITISH SURFERS LOOK FOR IN AN ISP



QUICK FIGURES

YOU'LL NEVER BELIEVE IT... »

- Over 4.5 million Britons looked for a flight or holiday online during June, according to Jupiter MMXI figures – 30 percent of the total UK Web population. Lastminute (***www.lastminute.com***) is the most popular travel site.
- **Twelve percent of UK surfers use the Web naked, says AOL (though it doesn't say why), with 37 percent opting for underwear alone. Apparently, Yorkshire is the county most likely to bare all.**
- Taureans are more likely to spend money online than any other starsign, reckons Pricerunner.com. Ninety five percent of them were prepared to part with their cash.
- **Children spend longer on the Internet than watching television, says a new report which claims 14 percent of parents ban access to the Web as a way of punishing their kids.**

BT

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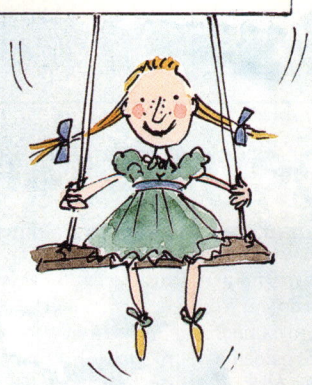

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brightsparks»

:// People doing great things online

'This Web site walks into a bar...'

SILLY JOKES ***www.sillyjokes.co.uk*** Proving there's more than enough room in cyberspace for fart gags and rubber chickens

Inspiration for e-commerce success comes in many forms. Many simply take an offline idea and convert it to an online business. Others are struck by a brilliant plan while surfing. For Phil and Caroline Creasey, however, it was a remote control fart machine which provided the spark needed to create their joke shop.

When Phil arrived home from his job as an electronics designer with one of the perennial student faves, it gave his wife Caroline the idea for Silly Jokes. 'Phil had learned about the Net designing a site at work,' explains Caroline, 'and suddenly we saw a way to put his skills to use making a bit of money on the side.' Initially, Silly Jokes launched, early last year, simply to sell the imported wind machines that had so titillated the couple. Its early success, however, spurred the Creaseys on to offer a whole range of gags from fake teeth and rubber chickens to drinking games and off-the-wall T-shirts.

Silly Jokes: fart gags and fake teeth

'I was soon running the site full time,' says Caroline, 'processing orders and sorting out the accounts. It got to the point where we didn't have the time to come home from work and sort the site out. We knew that if we didn't go for it we'd always regret it.' The couple quit their jobs, expanded the range on offer and turned part of their house in Silverstone, Northamptonshire into an impromptu stock room: 'We got no venture capital, we put all the money in ourselves. We've turned over £90,000 in the past year.'

The Creaseys: never a dull moment

Men are, unsurprisingly, the biggest buyers at Silly Jokes, with regular orders for stag nights and armed forces events. The Creaseys' newest ranges, however, are fancy dress costumes they hope will appeal to a wider range of surfer: already, the free games section of the site, which offers a range of Shockwave favourites, has attracted plenty of attention and increased traffic. Sometimes, it seems, it's the old ones that are the best...

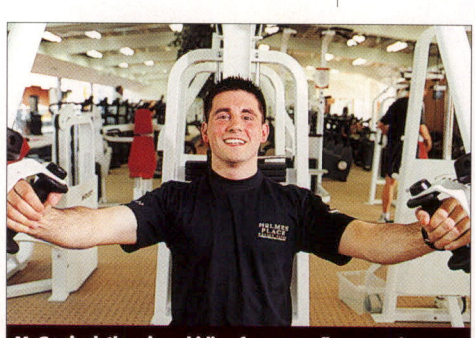
The keep-fit fan's Atlas

FITMAP ***www.fitmap.com*** Follow your training schedule wherever you are in the country

If you're a fitness fanatic away from home for a few days, how do you maintain your rigorous gym routine? A few sit-ups in someone's garden won't turn you into Charles Atlas.

Remembering this problem from the student days when he travelled round the country visiting relatives and his girlfriend, Lee McGarrigal decided to start The Fit Map with business partner Sheila Williams. The site includes a directory of just about every health club in the UK and Ireland, allowing you to find a place to pump iron before you even arrive in your host town. This Health Finder isn't just for gyms, though: you can search for physiotherapists, remedial masseurs and alternative treatments like aromatherapy, holistic therapy and health food shops.

'The Fit Map itself doesn't just mean working out or going for a run,' explains McGarrigal. 'It's the whole holistic nature of wellbeing, other than just exercise; it's all included in the whole package of feeling good.'


McGarrigal: there's no hiding from your fitness regime

The package has been expanded into a few lighthearted lifestyle features in the Men and Women sections, but the focus remains on health and fitness. This includes an interactive trainer, perhaps the most impressive part of the site, which provides a series of videos showing exercises for a muscle group selected by the user. It's so useful, we wondered if it might put real personal trainers out of a job. 'I wouldn't have thought so,' replies McGarrigal, comfortingly. 'Human beings coax people along, encourage them and assess whether they're doing their exercises or not, and then perhaps adapt them, where obviously a programme like ours can't see that'.

Still, the trainer is useful for absolute beginners, too, as are many other parts of the Online Fitness area, which also includes short features offering information and advice on losing weight, relaxation, building muscle, better eating and other topics. It's this range of content that McGarrigal hopes will draw people back to the site after they've used the directory: 'People find their information but come back and learn a little more.'

WORDS: ROBERT JEFFERY (SILLY JOKES), ALEX NEWBY (FITMAP); PICTURES: RICHARD LAWRENCE

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:// Whispers from the worlds of music, movies and games

MUSIC

Mercury rising for Web stars

The Mercury Music Prize is awarded this month. But which of the nominated artists deserves a gong for their Web presence?

Gorillaz: perhaps taking their commitment to cartoons too far by employing Mr Magoo as ticket collector

'Mercury Award? Sounds a bit heavy, man! Y'know, sorta like carrying a dead albatross round your neck for eternity.' So decreed Murdoc, the bassist with cartoon band Gorillaz, after his band had been nominated for this year's Mercury Music Prize. And he has a point: after winning, Roni Size and Portishead disappeared for years to concoct massively disappointing second albums.

Still, someone's got to please the notoriously unpredictable jury, but the Web presences of the nominees are a surprisingly good indication of who might get this year's poisoned chalice. Appropriately enough, the token non-pop act Susheela Raman has only a token one-page Web site (***www.narada.com/SusheelaBio.htm***). On the other hand, the two favourites for the prize have sites that are written about almost as much as the bands themselves. The Radiohead site (***www.radiohead.com***) is still one of the most intriguing on the Internet, gradually revealing its vast hidden depths with each visit. The Gorillaz site (***www.gorillaz.com***) is stupendous too, especially with its innovative linking between the audio CD and daft games like 'Find Murdoc's Winnebago'.

The only site to take the fight to these twin titans is that of Super Furry Animals (***www.superfurry.com***). As eccentrically humorous as the band themselves (which other band would include a chart of their favourite pies?), it's certainly the most interactive, regularly posting up reviews and pics taken by fans.

SFA clearly care personally about their Web presence. The same thing couldn't be said about PJ Harvey (***www.pjharvey.net***). Informative and user-friendly her site might be, but with no hint of any involvement from the great woman herself, it's as coldly remote as some of her songs. Far better is the much simpler Turin Brakes site (***www.turinbrakes.co.uk***) – whatever you make of their modernist folk-racket, their site is a thing of charm and beauty, with hand-written notes from the band and a hilarious cartoon flow-chart describing their career. Just as good, if a bit more hi-tech, is neo-progsters Elbow's site (***www.elbow.co.uk***), with its sophisticated graphics and tons of downloadable goodies.

Unfortunately, the dance acts don't even seem to be trying, perhaps assuming that their fans are too mashed to appreciate a decent site. The recently-revamped Zero 7 site (***www.zero7.co.uk***) is as soullessly proficient as the dance duo themselves (having Flash does not in itself make a good site). You might expect more from the cartoonish

MOVIES

Ripping off strips

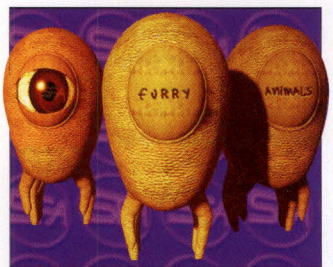
Hollywood is turning to stand-out comics for inspiration

While Hollywood's love affair with superheroes is expected to return to full-on passion with the release of *Spider-Man* next May, Hollywood is slowly embracing the wider world of comics. Based on the critically acclaimed underground comic by Daniel Clowes and starring Steve Buscemi and Thora Birch, *Ghost World* has been wowing Stateside critics with its mix of teen angst and outrageous humour. MGM offers a competent (if slight) site at ***www.mgm.com/ghostworld***, but there's a richer, wonderfully designed (by Clowes himself) site at ***www.ghostworld-themovie.com***. Featuring a nicely measured use of Flash – dial-up users only suffer short pauses – it's an atmospheric, informative and very funny site, packaged in real style. With in-depth production info and enjoyable interactive features, it's a perfectly formed site for a perfectly formed film.

Going back to *Spider-Man*, the recent release of the teaser trailer (from ***www.spider-man-movie.com***) has sent hopes for this film soaring higher than ever. Featuring a bank robbers' helicopter escape scuppered by a gigantic web spun between New York's World Trade Centre, fans marvelled at tantalising shots of a CGI Spidey swinging between skyscrapers at high speed.

***Spider-Man*: setting pulses racing across the Web**

Fans also got to see the first trailer for the Hughes Brothers' forthcoming Jack the Ripper flick *From Hell*

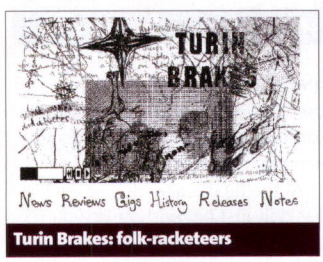


Super Furry Animals: eyeing the prize

Basement Jaxx (***www.astralwerks.com/basementjaxx***), but instead it's just the same swirly graphics and a bog-standard biog.

Tom McRae (***www.tommcrae.com***) gets bonus points for having a lovely olde worlde design, but then immediately loses them for making you register for 'full access to the site' (trust us, it's not worth it). The Ed Harcourt site (***www.edharcourt.com***) is a must-see, if only because it contains the full video to his single *Raccoon Boy*, which contains a highly disturbing scene involving Ed getting jiggy while chatting to a small furry puppet. Goldfrapp keep it simple at ***www.feltmountain.com*** with a cartoon cottage that allows you access to the usual site staples.

Cue trumpets: we reckon the Web version of the Mercury award should go to Radiohead, closely followed by SFA and then Gorillaz. Terrific records, too – for their sakes, let's hope none of them win...



Turin Brakes: folk-racketeers

(***www.fromhellmovie.com***), based on Alan Moore's acclaimed comic. While the trailer showcased an atmosphere thick enough to be sliced by the Ripper's knife, fans have noticed that Johnny Depp's 'Cawk-nee' accent may provide the unintentional comedy.

Finally, if you were one of those people who were disappointed by the supposedly 'shock ending' of Tim Burton's *Planet of The Apes*, it was all too familiar to director Kevin Smith, who apparently penned a highly similar scenario in his *Jay and Silent Bob* comic three years back. Read rants at ***www.viewaskew.com/newboard/messages289/723.html***.

***Dune Generations*: spice up your life**

GAMES

RPGs on a roll to the honour roll

Role-playing fans will soon be given a bigger character choice than goblin, wizard or troll

Games companies are finally cottoning on to the fact that not everyone who logs on to a multiplayer online world is a maladjusted social reject who spends his/her weekends rolling 20-sided dice, painting little lead men and wearing a wizard's hat. Up till now, the leading MMORPGs (that's Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game, non-nerds) have tended to go for the geek jugular with huge online fantasy worlds where progression was structured firmly around the traditional values of – shudder – Dungeons and Dragons.

That meant you'd hang out chatting to fellow 'adventurers' in the towns, then you'd set out together into the open to commit genocide against goblins, trolls, orcs, harpies, dragons and such with the goal of collecting magic goodies, and gaining enough Experience Points to rise up the character levels. But while gaining levels and grabbing a Magic Sword +1 (+3 against dragons) may be enough to have the geek hardcore frothing, it's not really going to float your boat if you're from the more normal 99.9 percent of society.

'Online gamer' need not equal 'scary nerd'

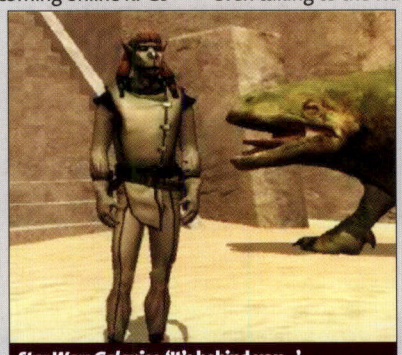
But this year, game developers seem to be finally getting the idea that 'online gamer' need not equal 'scary nerd' – and the result is some online RPGs which look a hell of a lot more interesting than the run-of-the-mill goblin-bashing we've had to endure since Net Year Dot.

Two of the most interesting upcoming online RPGs take the living worlds from sci-fi flicks (*Dune* and *Star Wars*) and recreate them online in 3D. And the developers have gone all-out to capture the flavour and the detail of the films. In *Dune Generations*, out next year, you have to gain respect among your online peers by trading or fighting, then rise through the ranks of your House and help to topple other rival Houses vying for control of the spice planet. The idea of working with other players within your House to crush a common foe is a clever one, and true to the film as well.

In *Star Wars Galaxies*, due late this year, the emphasis is on choice. Join up with the plucky rebels, become a spy for the boo-hiss Empire, try your luck as a Han Solo-style space smuggler, or even do a Luke-in-reverse and settle down to become a farmer. Your character develops by learning skills – a Jedi will have to learn how to build a lightsabre, then how to use one, then gradually progress to all the cool stuff like making things fly across the room.

Even less goblinny is EA's *Motor City Online*, due 2002, where you join thousands of other players in a city dedicated entirely to the worship of classic American cars. There are dealerships, auction houses and even workshops to fine-tune your cars before taking them out onto the streets to race.

Also from EA is, if we're honest, the only MMORPG with even half a chance of attracting female players – *The Sims Online*, due late next year. Basically, it's the old favourite *The Sims* but with thousands of players at once forming a virtual town complete with jobs, bars and romance (and entirely free of magic swords or towers inhabited by mad wizards). The guy behind *Sim City* is already working on new versions where the players themselves can 'theme' the towns they live in, creating anything from Wild West towns to peasant villages or even taking to the water with floating cities.


***Star Wars Galaxies*: 'It's behind you...'**

They won't impress someone who's spent the last few years building up respect for his alter ego Vvornth the Mighty in *Ultima Online*, but these games represent a turning point for the rest of us. MMORPGs are becoming respectable, well-designed – even interesting to the majority. Who knows, in a few months' time, you might even meet people in there who don't seem likely to be serial killers in the real world.

WORDS: JOHN MULLEN (MUSIC), DANNY GRAYDON (MOVIES), ROB WAUGH (GAMES)

what's new»

The best new sites we've found – plus your picks

:// NEW SITES

Now you can search without the stress

Getspliced.com: provides everything but the girl to help you make the best day of your life more of a dream than a nightmare

REVIEWED

Vivísimo
www.vivisimo.com
The tidiest member of the search engine family – the cluster engine

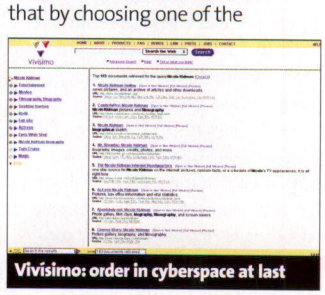
Getspliced
www.getspliced.com
Take full control of 'the greatest day of your life'

UK Course Finder
www.ukcoursefinder.com
Test yourself to find the ideal course for your interests

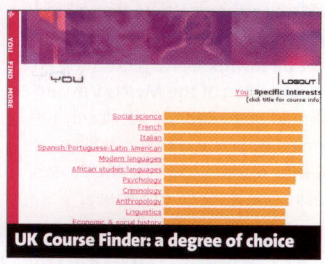
Expatsboxes
www.expatsboxes.com
Stock up on all the British goodies Johnny Foreigner doesn't sell

What makes Yahoo! such a useful search engine is the way it presents its results in categories, allowing you to bypass certain groups of irrelevant sites and look only at the ones most pertinent to your search. But if you're browsing idly or haven't decided exactly what you want to know about Newcastle United, Nicole Kidman or sci-fi, the headings and lists of results can still be daunting. Now a new site called **Vivísimo** (***www.vivisimo.com***) offers more guidance by organising the results of even the broadest search into a manageable list of neatly titled categories. It isn't a search engine as such, but what it calls a 'cluster engine', searching the content of a variety of search engines – such as Alta Vista, Lycos, Ask Jeeves and Yahoo! itself – and organising it into useful groupings. (If you really want to know, it uses 'a specifically developed hueristic algorithm to group textual documents.') Each category leads to sub-categories, and sometimes even more sub-categories, and finally a collection of specific sites to visit. Thus, Kidman fanciers can decide whether to investigate folders for biography, fan sites or Tom Cruise; sci-fi nuts can explore the contents of the 40s and 50s genre or collectibles. Looking for an online dictionary? Choose from glossaries, reference, translation and thesaurus folders. Vivísimo has a noticeably American bias, but that doesn't stop it being a great way to give some direction to your surfing.

Tying the knot in a registry office just doesn't have the same sense of occasion as a traditional ceremony, so more and more couples are choosing to make their civil wedding more memorable by saying their vows in an unusual venue. Madonna and Guy Ritchie had theirs in a Scottish castle, Pierce Brosnan got hitched in an Irish one, but you can do much better than that by choosing one of the wackier locations listed at **Getspliced** (***www.getspliced.com***), an 'alternative' wedding site that encourages you to forget tradition and do things your way. You'll find nothing here, then, on the correct order of ceremony, or what the best man should wear. But in addition to a long list of historic homes, the 10 venue categories on offer also include film and TV locations (why not have your knees-up in the Rovers on the *Corrie* set?) and animals and nature (say your vows by candlelight in the mysterious underground caves at Abercrave in Powys). Old Trafford and Brighton Pier feature under 'Special Interest'. Each listing comes with photo, information and full contact details, and many have links to their own sites. An ice sculpture as a centrepiece at the reception, fireworks as the couple kisses and a helicopter to whisk you away to your honeymoon might sound like great ideas, but where on earth do you find them? They're all listed among the extensive selection of service, where best men and maids of honour can also save themselves a headache by finding someone to organise the stag and hen nights for them.



Vivísimo: order in cyberspace at last



UK Course Finder: a degree of choice

At the tender age of 18, when life has only just begun, how do you decide which subject to pursue for three years of uni – and, possibly, the rest of your life? **UK Course Finder** (***www.ukcoursefinder.com***) has the answer. In addition to its database of over 50,000 UK university and college courses, it also offers a 15-minute psychometric test which cunningly works out your interests, enabling you to choose a subject and course you're guaranteed to enjoy. You'll be asked to rate your level of interest on topics as diverse as 'the cultural impact of art and design', 'the effects of sports training' and 'the surface of the earth', and then choose your preferred geographical location for any courses you might take. At the end of your test, the results are shown as a graph of your interests in descend-

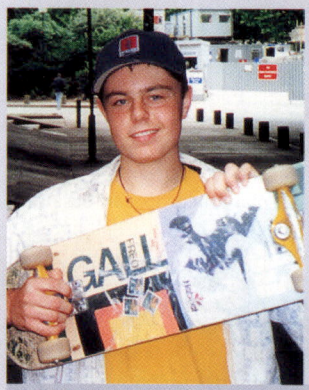
Expat Boxes: make friends with locals

ing order and labelled usefully by subjects used by higher education institutions. Click on any of the subjects shown to view the courses available – including combined courses – in the areas of your choice. If you still need help deciding what to study, the subject search will give you a summary of what each subject entails at higher education level; there's also advice and recommended reading on issues such as taking a gap year and what to do if your A-level results aren't quite what you were expected. This is an indispensable site for anyone considering higher education.

Anyone who's ever lived overseas will have experienced a yearning not just for the UK's green and pleasant land – but for its Marmite, Heinz tomato ketchup and Walkers crisps. But while friends and family might bring a few treats over, it's unlikely they'll be able to bring the stocks you dream of. So if you're planning a long stay abroad, make sure you've got access to **Expats Boxes** (***www.expatsboxes.com***). The site offers both bespoke and ready-made hampers to suit your every craving, all of which can be delivered within 3-10 days, wherever you are in the world. The British Bumper Box is likely to be the most popular, chock full as it is with such quintessential British foodstuffs as Bird's Custard, Bisto and baked beans; a Tea Time box includes a selection of McVitie's biscuits and cakes and PG Tips tea bags. The Expats Kids Box, with its Jammy Dodgers and Angel Delight, is likely to be just as popular with adults, and if you're having trouble sticking to your diet in a country whose primary foodstuffs are fatty meat and oil, the Diet Box provides all the essentials, including Ryvita and low-fat salad dressings. Boxes range from £4.50 to £49.50 and come emblazoned with a Union Jack. Visitors can view Photos from Home, which displays tear-jerking images of green fields, red phone boxes and grazing cows. All that's missing is the national anthem.

Look what we've found!

SKATEBOARDERS We risked flying boards to ask skaters where they, er, surfed to…



LUKE MORGAN
STUDENT

I'm a bit of a computer geek – as well as using skateboarding sites I also chat a lot on the Net, and until it got closed down for a bit I used to use Napster (***www.napster.com***) a lot.

TOM BONYNGE
STUDENT

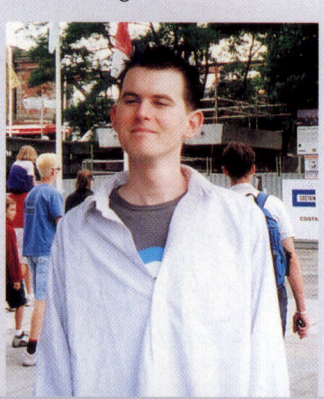
I mostly use the Net for email – I have a Hotmail account, but I also like to look at skateboarding sites such as ***www.skateboarding.com*** which is the Transworld Skateboarding site.

ALEX PALGROVE
STUDENT

Most of the skate sites are American and I don't really like that. I use Skateboard UK at ***www.sk8uk.co.uk***. It's got a good list of skate parks across the UK which I find really useful.

ANTONY MARTINEZ
STUDENT

I use Slam City (***www.slamcity.com***). It's a skate shop near Covent Garden. The site has quite a good online shop and there's also a diary of future skate events.



JAMES MITCHELL
FREELANCE WRITER

I use ICQ (***www.icq.com***) to keep in touch with people. As far as general sites go I have to say I use the Liv4Now site (***www.liv4now.com***). Well I do work for it, after all!

RYAN SWEENEY
STUDENT

I use the Web for email, boards and equipment. A favourite site is ***www.boarduniverse.com*** as it deals with other sports such as surfboarding and snowboarding too.

POLLY OWEN
BARMAID

I really like skate shoes, so one of my favourite sites is DC Shoes at ***www.dcshoes.com***. You can buy online and there's some good videos to watch. I also like the Flash at ***www.dvsshoecompany.com***.

GRAHAM BAKER
OFFICE WORKER

I'm only just getting used to the Net – I haven't got it at home yet. My favourite site is ***www.worldindustries.com*** – the home of the World Industries professional skateboarding and snowboarding teams.

JAMES WHITWORTH
SHOP ASSISTANT

I buy a lot of skating kit and clothes over the Net. One really good site I enjoyed recently was the Skateboard Science site at ***www.exploratorium.edu/skateboarding*** – it's really good.

INTERVIEWS AND PHOTOS: DAN GRABHAM

letters»

Send your letters to: Inbox, *the net*, 38-42 Hampton Road, Teddington, Middlesex TW11 0JE or email us at ***thenetnow@haynet.com***

Dear Sir

LETTER OF THE MONTH I'm a Mac user. It seems that phrase continually labels me an outcast within the Internet community. You and the other Internet magazines seem to shun us, as do many sites. We're a pretty vocal bunch but it seems the message just isn't getting through. I use a Mac at work and at home and I'm worried that companies think there is no future for the Net on the Mac. Too many sites have features that only work on a PC. I don't really think you cover enough Mac-orientated software, either – for example, the 'Top Software' (in Advice Centre, see p112) feature rarely covers anything for Macs, and I really think you should try and improve in this area.
James Roberts, via email

We do try to cover software and applications for both Mac and PC – we know we have an awful lot of readers are Mac users. But very often, small downloads – such as those often featured in the Top Software section – are not Mac compatible. Where we talk about a download or software we always try to suggest a Mac alternative, such as in this issue's Top 20 Downloads feature (p92). But sadly, it can sometimes be difficult. And don't worry – companies do believe in Internet usage on Macs. Microsoft and Macromedia, two of the biggest players on the Web, clearly think they are important. After all, they've developed top class free packages and plug-ins for the platform. And if you're in any doubt that we like Macs here at the net *– we use them to write and put together this very magazine...*

Dear Sir

I really find the attitude and complacency of many ISPs unbelievable. I have now used a succession of big-name ISPs and not one of them was of any help when I've had a problem. I've always tried to contact them by email first and then by the phone, but rarely have I ever got a positive result.

It seems ISPs have gone the way of many companies these days, with endless phone queues and touch-tone menus. When you do finally get through to an operator, they're often clueless and offer me no advice to get further help. What's more, I later get my phone bill and realise that the calls have cost me an arm and a leg!

I really think there should be a regulator set up to sort out the mess surrounding them. I mean, who's actually responsible for them? There doesn't seem to be anyone I can complain to if I can't get the actual ISP to solve the problem.

I found your features on ISP helplines and the A-Z of Internet Know How (August issue) very good, but it's not really going to solve the problems with rogue ISPs.
Martin Richards, via email

*At present, Oftel (**www.oftel.gov.uk**) look after the regulation of ISPs. You can get in touch as a last resort if the problem is not sorted out, but as it says on the Web site, '...the onus is on the consumer to pick the service provider that provides a package that best meets their needs in terms of performance and value for money.' If not, you can contact them using the details at the site. The Government is in the process of creating a super-regulator, called Ofcom, which will have power over ISPs. It was first suggested in the 2000 Communications White Paper and outlined in the Queen's Speech earlier this year. The body will be in place by 2003 and will have power over all communications. You can see more information on Ofcom at **www.ofcom.gov.uk**.*

A reader rants

The sunny side of Cyber Street

Is it that you don't have the space, or are most Net users really as dull as your interviews (Look What We've Found!, September issue) make them appear? Business email? Stock market? Holiday bookings? Research? Is that it? I'm 50 years old (which has come as a bit of a shock, I don't mind telling you) and have been online for a couple of years – and I can truly say that the Net has changed my life. There is so much out there, such a wealth of worlds to explore, so many laughs, so much information and stimulation to be had. I have plumbed the depths of the tacky and bizarre and have a list of favourites which has gone way beyond my capacity to scroll.

Tardis: or is it Nita's modem?

My modem is my Tardis to wonders previously unsuspected, and I've only just scratched the surface. I'm passionate about the Internet and am astonished when I hear people say they only use it for this or that, because to me it's an endless voyage of delight and discovery that has enriched my life beyond words. So I'm just a bit curious to know if I'm the only one out here who's having such fun with all of this. And by the way, Fred Durst, never mind what *the net* says; I love you. My way or the highway. Indeed.
Nita, via email

We're not entirely convinced by your devotion to Fred Durst but yes, of course we all know the Internet is full of fun, grotesque and bizarre stuff. But the simple fact is that a lot of people aren't interested in the Internet for that – they actually do want to know how to get cheaper plane tickets or how to make better use of their email. After all, when you've managed to save valuable time taking care of the basic things in life online, it leaves even more time for your hobbies. Whatever they may be...

Dear Sir

I hope no one takes the article about musical instruments as gospel (Dealfinder, August issue). I can't comment on the article in general since it was reasonably wide-ranging in its scope but please don't go out and spend £355 on a Epiphone Les Paul Studio. First, the Studio is not a slightly superior version of the Standard. The finish on the Standard is better (and better still on the deluxe). Secondly, by walking into most guitar shops you will get a better price than £355. My local guitar shop will sell you an LP Studio for £239 and by scouring the music press you could shave a few pounds off that price. Don't assume that the Web is always going to be cheapest.
Robin Hall, via email

Dear Sir

A big thanks for recommending **www.cd-wow.com** in your July issue. I emailed my order on Sunday, received confirmation on Monday and received my CD on Wednesday. Wow! Madison Avenue – HMV local price £16.95, CD-Wow price £8.99 including postage. What service!
Peter Bettany, via email

Absolutely; it's just a shame it had to be Madison Avenue...

WINE FOR WORDS!

The writer of Letter of the Month wins a case of fine wine from Rouge-Blanc.com, the award-winning Web site bringing 'Calais prices' to your door.

Rouge & Blanc®
http://www.rouge-blanc.com

WHO WE ARE For main contact details, see page 3

the net, 38-42 Hampton Road, Teddington, Middlesex TW11 0JE, United Kingdom
Email ***thenetnow@haynet.com*** **Phone** 020 8267 5000 **Editorial** 020 8267 5870 **Advertising** 020 8267 5015 **Subscriptions** 01795 414807 **Fax Advertising** 020 8943 5815 **Fax Editorial** 020 8943 5819

CONTRIBUTORS Steve Clemens, Tom Dunmore, John Gosling, Danny Graydon, Chris Hadley, David Hurst, Andy Hutchinson, Peter Liddiard, Shaun Marin, Claire McHattie, John Mullen, Sarah Ramsden, Chris Rennie, Tim Richardson, David Semple, Rob Waugh, Nick Wright **Editorial Co-ordinator** Hazel van Wieringen THANKS TO... Rob Bright, Dr-K, Colin Powell ADVERTISING **Group Ad Manager** Rachael Coles **Ad Manager** John Burke **Display Sales Executive** Shahnaz Sidhwa **Classified Sales** Gurbir Phull **Special Projects Manager** Martyn Jones **Secretary** Kate Collins PRODUCTION **Group Production Manager** Darren Jones **Production Controller** Jason Kerrigan THE MANAGEMENT **Publisher** Sian Rees **Publishing Manager** Robert Frumkin **Head of Trade Marketing** Sarah Magraw **Group Subs Manager** Abby Payton **Editorial Director** Mel Nichols **Design Director** Paul Harpin **Finance Director** Brian Freeman **Managing Director** Kevin Costello **Chairman** Eric Verdon Roe

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1984 and all that

BIG BROTHER ***www.channel4.com/bigbrother*** National obsession, Net revolution

:BIGBROTHER

WHAT IS IT?
Supporting site for the extraordinarily successful Channel 4 show of the same name

LAUNCHED
July 2000

TRAFFIC
1.2 million users during *Big Brother 2*, with 16 million live video streams served up

BASE
London

KEY FEATURES
Live action from the *BB* house, news on the contestants, interviews, quizzes, competitions, auctions and e-commerce

BLAME GEORGE ORWELL. IN HIS legendary tome *1984*, the visionary author provided us with a glimpse of a future in which our every movement, conversation and deed would be followed by an unseen omnipresence named Big Brother.

The eponymous TV show, which originated in Holland and spread to the UK last year, may have had more to do with sensationalist voyeurism than Orwell's totalitarian nightmare, but its basic premise was essentially the same: to trap 'ordinary' members of the public in a goldfish bowl in which their freedom of expression was impinged upon by the certain knowledge that their actions were being watched by millions.

Whether any of the *BB* contestants were anywhere near as scarred as Orwell's protagonists is extremely doubtful. In a delicious irony, however, it soon became clear that the tables were being turned on the rest of us – far from assuming the Big Brother role, we were the ones being controlled, as the show intruded uninvited into every corner of our daily lives. Media saturation left us no alternative but to follow the events from Channel 4's custom-built studios in East London; from TV broadcasts (including 18-hour live streams on cable channel E4) to saturation coverage in the print media, *Big Brother* was following us. And nowhere did it shadow us more closely than the Internet.

Love or loathe the show, *Big Brother* quickly became very important to anyone who cares about the Web. Even if you weren't watching the live coverage from your desktop at work (and every office in Britain included at least one *BB* junkie), the impact of C4's site has changed the UK Internet landscape for good.

One glance at the figures shows the remarkable impact of the site: within seven days of launching at the start of the first *BB*, it was the most popular entertainment site on the Web. By the end of the show's nine-week run it was Europe's biggest site, offering news on the show and its contestants, polls and, later, auctions and lengthy features.

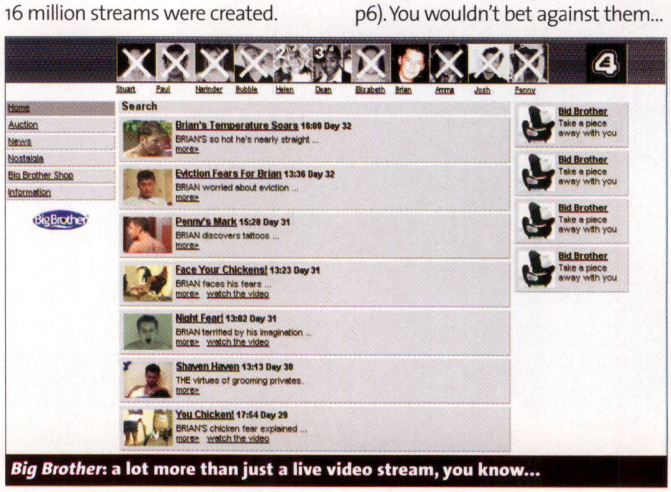
There have been overnight hits before, of course, many of them now consigned to the dustbin of Internet history. *BB*, however, is different: the astounding traffic figures were largely made up of users watching the action live on their desktops through RealPlayer connections. For the first time, surfers were choosing the Web over TV; logging on to monitor the daily activities of Craig, Anna et al (and Helen and Paul a year later) became part of a daily routine. Moreover, the site proved that streaming live video online could work, despite a number of false starts and inflated figures from other events. Stats from *Big Brother 2*, which climaxed in July, suggest 1.2 million users visited and 16 million streams were created.

For many, *Big Brother* was the first time they went onto the Web

'The Web was always part and parcel of the *Big Brother* format,' says Andrew Gumbridge, managing editor of Channel 4 Interactive. 'The idea first and foremost was for a great TV show, but it was evident this was cross-media; more than simply a site to support the show. Streaming was a massive talking point, right from the start. We want to be talked about.'

Indeed, so overwhelming was the demand for Web coverage of *BB* that the site collapsed under the pressure within 25 minutes of first launching: 'We were victims of our own success. No-one had any idea that streaming would be anything more than an enormous risk. The response knocked us for six.' A team of 70 was put in place to run the site from the *BB* house, transferring video from the show's cameras to Net-ready streams, writing news stories and adding features. Gumbridge suggests that watching the show online was most people's first experience of streaming and, in many instances, their first time online.

So while the critics might deride *Big Brother*'s format or knock its apparent superficiality, there's no doubt it's done more to get Britain truly wired than any Government initiative. The next challenge for Gumbridge and his team may well be to get us all paying to watch (see p6). You wouldn't bet against them...



***Big Brother*: a lot more than just a live video stream, you know...**

WORDS: ROBERT JEFFERY

MOBILES AND ACCESSORIES | SHOPPING ONLINE

It's good to talk

Use the Web to pay as you go and you could find yourself paying even less

You've got to have a mobile, right? But if you don't want a whopping monthly fee and a wave of nausea every time your bill arrives, a pay-as-you-go mobile is the obvious alternative. You still have to fork out for a handset and accessories, though, so we shopped around and found some affordable deals online for all the major networks.

Buying from a major high street store might give confidence to novice shoppers, but that confidence comes at a price. Carphone Warehouse (***www.carphonewarehouse.com***) was the most expensive site we found; at £149.99, the BT Nokia 3330 was £30 more than at Mobiles UK (see below), and there were substantial differences elsewhere, too. Still, delivery was free, and the well-designed site offered the largest selection of phones and networks, as well as the all-important payment vouchers. The Link (***www.thelink.com***) wasn't much cheaper, but had a useful search facility allowing you to view only WAP mobiles under £100 or BT Cellnet mobiles that are 45mm wide – provided they exist.

Comet (***www.comet.co.uk***) offered several excellent online-only prices for phones, including the Sony J5 and Nokia 3310 (each under £97 here, while nearer £120 on many other sites). It's frustrating, though, that you have to pick a phone by network and then by price before you discover it's too ugly to be seen with. Delivery – free from most other sites – was disappointingly pricey.

Looks aren't everything, of course. The fussy layout of Mobileshop (***www.mobileshop.com***) might be off-putting, but a little patience soon pays off. Several phones here were some £20 cheaper than on the high street store sites, and accessories were reasonable, too.

A 'genuine' Advanced In-Car Unit for an Ericsson T28 was very good value at £99.99, and while a 'genuine' Nokia in-car charger might set you back £19.99, Mobileshop's own was a tenner cheaper. It's also a good place to replace a lost mains charger or find a novelty accessory.

MobilesUK (***www.mobilesuk.net***) was another site which put the high street stores to shame: at £114.99, the Sony J5 on Orange was among the cheapest we found, as was the Nokia 3310 with Vodafone or BT (both just under £108). A small but neatly presented selection was available for most of the main networks, and clicking on your selection provided plenty of information.

Talkingshop (***www.talkingshop.com***) had a fine range of accessories for most types of phone (look in the Accessories section of Extras). They're not particularly cheap – nor are the phones – but it's a neat site and includes a good range of fascias (clip-on covers).

FASCIAS £14.99
www.talkingshop.com
Clip-on covers to turn your mobile into a fashion accessory.

Cheapmobiles (***www.cheap-mobiles.com***) was, as you'd hope, pretty cheap, if laborious to use and lacking phone specs and info. Still, we were impressed to find the Nokia 3310 at a flat £125 whether on Orange, Vodafone or BT Cellnet, while the best bargain of all was a Nokia 3210 on Orange for an amazing £90. The triple-pack of universal carry case, in-car charger and hands-free kit was a very competitive £11.99.

Although the home page at ETCcomms (***www.etccomms.co.uk***) includes BT Cellnet and Vodafone logos, only Orange pre-pay phones are on offer. But it's a popular network, so who's complaining when handsets are this cheap: Motorola V2288 for £59.99 and the Nokia 3310 or Ericsson T20 each £99.99, to name but three.

The A-B Accessories site (***www.abaccessories.co.uk***) also undercut many sites on phones. But accessories are its raison d'être – hence the name – and it excelled with offers such as a hands-free kit for an unbeatable £3.95 whatever your phone model, and an in-car charger for £7.95. There are loads of fascias here, too, all under £9. Cheaper still was M99 (***www.m-99.com***), a peculiar-looking site with almost unbelievable prices: £2.85 for a hands-free kit, leather cases for the same price and novelty fascias to delight your friends at under £5.

The homely Ukphoneshop.com (***www.ukphoneshop.com***) gives brand snobs a chance to enjoy a bargain: here a 'genuine' Nokia in-car charger for a 3310 is an easily affordable £12.25, though it's a pity you can't view any of the accessories available before you buy. You can view the phones, however, many of which are also reasonably priced.

Once you've chosen the network tariff that suits your pocket as well as the price of the hardware does, you can start making calls while keeping tighter control of your bank balance. Now, at long last, it really is good to talk...

;-) Our top pre-pay mobile sites

MOBILES UK
www.mobilesuk.net ★★★★★
Mobiles UK puts the high street stores to shame with its competitive prices and neat site.

MOBILESHOP
www.mobileshop.com ★★★★
The excellent deals on phones and accessories more than made up for this site's untidy looks.

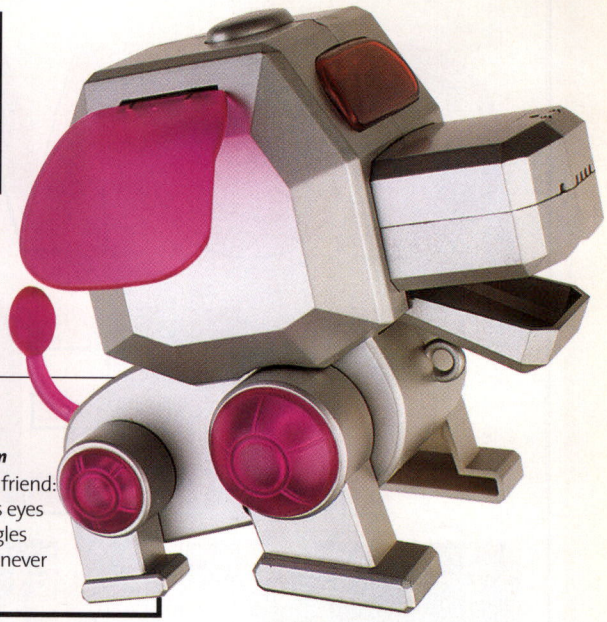
UKPHONESHOP
www.ukphoneshop.com ★★★
Offers major brand accessories at affordable prices, plus some good deals on mobiles.

WORDS: ALEX NEWBY; PICTURES: CHRIS RENNIE

NOKIA 3210 £85

www.ukphoneshop.com

This popular, stylish mobile is the cheapest Nokia available. With BT Cellnet, this was the best price we found it at. A bargain.



BOBBY DOG ALERT £24.99

www.mobileshop.com

A mobile user's best friend: Bobby Dog barks, his eyes light up and he wiggles about excitedly whenever your phone rings.

TRIPLE-PACK COVER, EARPIECE AND IN-CAR CHARGER £11.99

www.cheap-mobiles.com

Essential accessories for anyone with a mobile and a busy lifestyle to boot.

SIEMENS SL45 £299.99

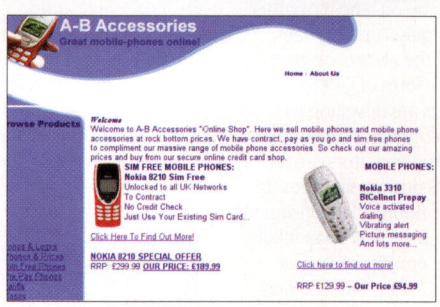
www.talkingshop.co.uk

State-of-the art mobile which doubles as an ultra-cool status symbol. This was the price using the Virgin network.

CHEAP MOBILES

www.cheap-mobiles.com ★★★★

Come here for – guess what – cheap mobiles and excellent value accessories, though not for info.



A-B ACCESSORIES

www.abaccessories.co.uk ★★★★

Unbelievably cheap extras and accessories. Many of the phones undercut the competition, too.

CARPHONE WAREHOUSE

www.carphonewarehouse.com ★★★

The biggest range of mobiles and accessories online, though also one of the most expensive.

COME AND MEET US!

Want advice straight from the experts? Come and talk to us at LIVE 2001

The Internet has moved fast. In just a few years, it has transformed from an exclusive club presenting ugly, plain text pages to the fun-packed, fully interactive adventure we all know today. And it keeps changing by the minute, placing new demands on your connection, your software and your knowhow.

Which is why we're offering a free advice service to visitors at LIVE 2001, the UK's biggest consumer electronics show, to be held at Birmingham's NEC between 21 and 23 September. Come along and *the net* team will be on hand every day to solve your problems – be it choosing the right ISP, deciding whether to go broadband, or simply ensuring the software handling your browsing and email is the best it can be.

And while you're at the show, you can catch up on a host of other new technologies. This year sees the launch of the always-on mobile Internet in the form of GPRS; manufacturers are unveiling a wealth of next-generation handsets, and most of the operators are rolling out new GPRS pricing packages (BT has already announced its pricing for the service – others will soon follow).

The service promises Internet heaven: with GPRS, email and rich Web pages are only a click away. Or at least that's the promise: come and judge for yourself at LIVE.

Meanwhile, the growth in broadband has fuelled interest in online gaming, and soon Sony and Microsoft are to go head-to-head in cyberspace, Sony with its online facility for PlayStation 2 and Microsoft with the launch of Xbox. Sega has withdrawn from console manufacturer and concentrated instead on what it does best: involving, exciting games.

Aside from *the net*, you'll also find stands dedicated to our sister publications, *Stuff* and *What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision*. Featuring the hottest new gadgets for the discerning male, *Stuff* will be showcasing its newly announced Awards at the Show, which promise to range from must-have PDAs to drop-dead gorgeous laptops. *What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision*, meanwhile, will be on hand to give advice on choosing and buying your hi-fi and surround sound systems, as well as giving state-of-the-art demonstrations of new products on their stand.

Get your advice from the magazine with the answers – put 21-23 September in your diary now.

LIVE
THE HOME ELECTRONICS SHOW
21-23 SEPT 2001, NEC

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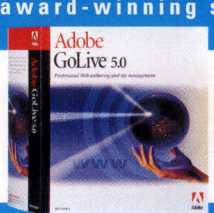

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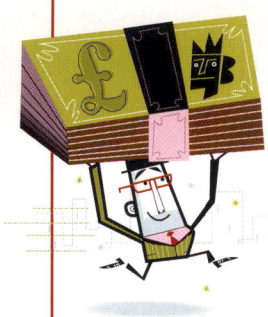
THE ONLINE MONEY GUIDE

You don't need a virtual fortune to make your money work harder online – we've got the sites to monitor it, make it and manage it

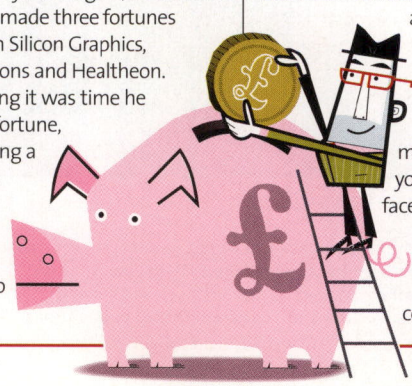


MONEY CAN BE SUCH A NUISANCE, SUCH A drain on time and energy. Why bother putting so much effort into earning it if you have to spend all your time looking after it, checking that it's pulling its weight, nursing it through every little crisis?

Take Jim Clark, the legendary Internet entrepreneur. Clark's finances were so complicated that he employed a full-time staff of advisors and planners to keep tabs on his money. Then again, he did have rather a lot of it, having made three fortunes from the Internet – with Silicon Graphics, Netscape Communications and Healtheon.

Two years ago, thinking it was time he made himself another fortune, Clark realised that landing a few billion dollars more would leave him with even bigger financial headaches than he had already – and decided to kill two birds with one stone by founding MyCFO (***mycfo.com***), a Net-based financial services company that has rapidly grown to become the highest-rated wealth-management company in the world. As of January this year it was managing $44bn of assets.

MyCFO (from the job title Chief Finance Officer) is certainly a handy little site – it will fine-tune your investment strategy, reduce time wasted on financial management, solve tax headaches, cut costs and get you the best deal on insurance. Its experts will even tailor-make a money management strategy just for you, while the unique online interface means you can check all your finances 24 hours a day. Thing is, it charges $25,000 a year – lots more if your finances are very complicated (and whose aren't?).



WORDS: CHRIS HADLEY; ILLUSTRATIONS: DAVID SEMPLE

Moreover, you must have a minimum of $10million in the bank to qualify for membership (although your desktop calculator could tell you that the 310 clients with $44bn assets have an average worth of $140 million each).

Okay, so maybe at $25,000 it's not for you. But you don't have to spend that kind of money to benefit from the Internet revolution in financial management. Out there in cyberspace are all the services offered by MyCFO – on a smaller scale. Art Shaw, CEO and president of MyCFO, speaks for many similar services: 'We believe that you deserve the peace of mind of knowing that you are in complete control of your wealth.' And that can be achieved without paying $25k – you can knock your own finances into shape and tell your CFO to clear his desk.

The Web has revolutionised financial management not only for the super rich, but for anyone who has bills to pay. And anyone with a few pennies left over can reap even more benefits from the ever-expanding assortment of financial Web sites. There's no end of free advice on everything from how to clear your debt to how to start day trading on the foreign exchange markets.

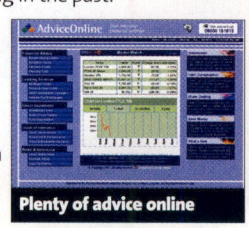
If you want to invest, you can access beginner's guides, the latest business and financial news, or read expert broker's reports for free. Go a stage further and set up an online portfolio, play virtual share trading games to hone your skills, then take the plunge and invest for the long term – or set yourself up as a day trader, buying and selling shares from home.

The Net makes finance speedy and simple

At a basic level there are tools and calculators for keeping on top of your finances 24/7 – you can transfer money from one account to another at 4am to cover that cheque you wrote at A Touch of Spice a couple of hours previously. You can apply for loans and credit cards, mortgages and insurance without leaving your computer screen. The Net makes financial transactions speedy and convenient, allows you to make informed decisions and, best of all, cuts the cost to you by increasing competition and reducing the overheads of the financial service providers. Never before have we had such power over our money.

'The Net has completely changed the way people manage their money,' says research analyst Ed Millward. 'Someone who didn't even bother reading the personal financial advice in *The Sun* can now take control of their financial profile like never before.' But you won't have much of a life if you have to spend every day hunched over your computer ploughing through the morass of financial sites, fretting about which shares to buy, who provides the cheapest gas, which broker's report you should be reading – things you'd never have dreamed of doing in the past.

The Web might have empowered us when it comes to handling our money, but to make the most of it we have to navigate a confusing array of services.



Plenty of advice online

Drop by any of the big-name financial sites without a degree in economics and a taste for reading the financial pages and you could be forgiven for switching off. You'll be greeted with a frenzy of flashy and flashing banners, colourful charts, mysterious tables, and screaming headlines. There are thousands of links squeezed into boxes, crammed into columns or emblazoned across your screen. Millward agrees that lots of people are turned off because they're being presented with too many options: 'There needs to be some kind of rationalisation of online financial services – and there will be. Not enough people are using them. We're also seeing competition forcing down commission on share deals, for example, and some services are going to go under.'

Until the cull comes, you'll have to find your own way around. But we're here to help. You'll find the following three pages organised around the three key themes of financial management: making it work, getting more from it and looking after it. (We'll leave spending it up to you, although p46 may save you cash.) Many sites try to be all things at once, but each has its strengths and weaknesses. We've picked the choicest and easiest to use services across a range of sites to give you the tools to become your own CFO. »

MAKING IT WORK

ITS 5.30AM AND LEE'S ADRENALINE, FUELLED BY coffee and fags, is already flowing in unhealthy quantities. He's leaning into the computer screen squinting at his charts, reading the runes, fathoming the secrets of the tea-leaves. Seconds later he's up, pacing the room, then back to the screen. In a few hours, the London Stock Exchange will be open and Lee needs to hone his strategy – today could be the day when he strikes it rich. Then again, it's more likely to be the day when he loses big time.

That was 18 months ago, during what Lee now calls his 'madness', when he tried to get rich as a day trader, buying and selling shares on the Internet. Today, Lee, poorer but wiser, works for a record label, back in the 9-5 trying to replenish his savings. 'I might as well have based my trades on the day's horoscope for all I really knew,' he admits.

Day trading consists of buying and selling shares on the same day, hopefully at a profit and often on borrowed money. For most people it ends in tears. 'Day trading is a stressful, full time job. It is always high risk,' warns the Financial Services Authority. When day trading goes wrong – and by all accounts it usually does – it can go horribly wrong.

For most people, day trading ends in tears

Don't say we didn't warn you, but if you've read about those mysterious day traders who are said to make hundreds of thousands a day, or even millions, and want to find out more, you can do worse than the FAQ on day trading on The Motley Fool's discussion board 'Day Trading – The Devil's Den'.

Share buying is certainly the most high-profile and revolutionary aspect of Internet finances. And you don't have to be an adrenaline junkie au fait with shorting, hedging, ramping and trading on margin to take advantage of it. In fact, most people who use the Web for buying shares are likely to be mild-mannered types making decisions based on careful research rather than a gambler's intuition. If you fancy giving it a go there's one site that stands out as ideal for beginners and experts alike: The Motley Fool. Registration is free, and once you're a fully-fledged Fool you'll easily find all the advice you need to develop a no-nonsense investment strategy online.

Once you know your bears from your bulls, you'll want to find an online broker, so it's time nip over to Gomez for a highly detailed comparison chart of what the various brokers offer and how much they charge. The key choice is between brokers who let you buy and sell stocks at real-time prices – essential for day trading – and those with email services or prices a few minutes old which are cheaper to use. Alternatively, take our advice and head over to the highly-respected brokers Hargreaves Lansdown – it's easy to use, neat enough not to be daunting and the pricing structure couldn't be clearer. For the latest financial news you can't go wrong with Bloomberg Online, and for the best analysis, try Multexinvestor, which offers sought-after brokers' reports.

Eventually you'll also want to check out what the tipsters are saying. Mrs Cohen is probably the most famous of the online tipsters, but you'd do well to have a look at Michael Walters' excellent site. Walters, a well-informed former *Daily Mail* journalist, has an easily accessible no-nonsense style and plenty of useful pointers. The annoying news is that he introduced a subscription fee at the end of August. The one all-singing, all-dancing investor site which is definitely worth getting to know is the excellent and acronymic ADVFN (Advanced Financial Network). If you want all the facts at your fingertips you can find them here. You'll be able to set up a portfolio to keep track of your favourite shares and receive email alerts when they reach a price you specify. There's also an option to view real-time prices for a small fee.

If all this is too much too soon, you might think about setting up an investment club with a group of friends, so you can pool your spare cash and help each other get a hang of the finer points of stocks and shares. If so, Proshare is the only place to go.

SITE CHECKLIST >>

- ***www.fool.co.uk***
- ***www.uk.gomez.com***
- ***www.h-l.co.uk***
- ***www.bloomberg.co.uk***
- ***www.multexinvester.co.uk***
- ***www.mrscohen.com***
- ***www.michaelwalters.com***
- ***freeserve.advfn.com/freeindex.php***
- ***www.proshare.org.uk***

GETTING MORE FROM IT

EARN IT, DON'T SPEND SO MUCH OF IT, borrow it, win it, inherit it, apply for a grant, pick up benefits or turn to a life of crime – these are the eight main ways to get more wedge in your hip pocket. We recommend that you focus your energies on the first two... but who are we to tell you what to do? If you're going to earn more money it might be time to get a new job, improve your qualifications or pluck up the courage to negotiate a pay rise. Some excellent job search and career advice sites have sprung up in the last couple of years and it's not easy to chose between them, but we like Work Thing because it gives as much emphasis to advice as to the job adverts.

Although you might get lucky and find your dream job at one of the general job sites they aren't necessarily where you'll find the best posts in your field. We recommend you pop over to Ask Jeeves and type the question 'Where can I find a job?'. That will bring up a list of industry-specific job sites. If you're tired of being a wage slave, maybe it's time to go it alone. British Telecom's business centre has a new section packed with first rate advice for anyone thinking about setting up their own business – you can download 30 briefings on everything from writing a business plan to effective PR and employment law.

If you're in a Mr Micawber situation and your spending outstrips your income, it's all too easy to pretend you're going to increase your income in the near future. But if you've faced up to the fact that it's time to cut back on those Cuban cigars, there are plenty of tools to get you started – you might even free up some cash to start playing the stock market. Your first port of call should be the FT Your Money Saving Money Centre which will take you step by step through your income and expenditure and then magically offer you links to tools that can save you money. Or try Buy It, with its no-brainer interface. This site claims it can save you £150 a year on utility bills. And if you want to do your bit for the environment and save cash at the same time, pay a visit to the Doing Your Bit site, where you'll find advice on cutting your energy bills – apparently, every home can save £100 a year.

Apparently, every home can save £100 a year on energy bills

If you absolutely must have that new car or holiday then you'll want to test drive Money Supermarket, where you can compare hundreds of personal loans and credit cards in an instant.

That just leaves five ways of making money: Competitions Online will give you a list of the online lotteries and cash prizes up for grabs. Think Will offers unbeatable advice on making a will, so you'll be able to help your Great Aunt Maud draw up hers before she goes in for that major operation. The National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts has millions of pounds in grants to give away to poets and inventors. If times are hard you need to spend a few minutes at Entitled To, far and away the best site on benefit entitlements. And if after all that you're still fantasising about the big heist then you'd better read the BBC's special report 'Life of Crime' to bring you back down to earth.

SITE CHECKLIST >>

- ***www.workthing.co.uk***
- ***www.ask.co.uk***
- ***www.business.bt.com/sme/dbriefings/start_up_index.htm***
- ***www.ftyourmoney.com/guides/saving/saving_gateway.html***
- ***www.buyit.co.uk***
- ***www.doingyourbit.org.uk***
- ***www.moneysupermarket.com***
- ***www.competitions-online.co.uk/cashprizes***
- ***www.nesta.org.uk/home.html***
- ***www.thinkwill.co.uk/index.htm***
- ***www.entitledto.co.uk***
- ***news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/in_depth/uk/2001/life_of_crime/default.stm***

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HOTPOINT	SAMSUNG
JVC	SENNHEISER
KEF	SHARP
KENWOOD	SIEMENS
KODAK	SIGMA
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Dixons price: £249.89

Jenoptik JD350E

A perfect entry level model with a 307k CCD and a fixed 640x480 image resolution, 8Mb of internal memory, and both serial and USB connections

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Pentax EI-200

This camera features a high quality 3x zoom lens with a 2.11 MegaPixel CCD and features an IrDA port for a wireless link

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Jessops price: £399.90

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LOOKING AFTER IT

IF THE WEB HASN'T ALREADY DONE ENOUGH to change the day-to-day management of money, it soon will. Being able to pay bills and check how little money you've got in your bank account at all hours of the day and night is undoubtedly lots of fun (it might even be liberating, as Robbie Coltrane so boldly claimed in that telly ad), but wouldn't it be fantastic if you could view all your financial details in one place – just like the clients of MyCFO?

Data aggregation has already taken off in the US, with more than a million customers signing up with services offered by banks and portals such as Yahoo!, and now there's every sign that it will soon reach our shores. It means you can go to one site to view and monitor your current account, savings account, investments, mortgage, credit cards, share dealing, air miles and so on – all the pies you have fingers in, all at the same time. Since the beginning of the year Barclays and Egg, both pioneers in online banking, have been hinting that they're working on introducing a data aggregation service in the UK. Egg has just joined forces with Microsoft Network and Corillion, the US-based financial services company behind many banking services both here and in the US, teamed up with the e-business solutions company Unisys at the end of July to develop an 'account aggregation solution' for UK banks.

Soon, you'll be able to see all your financial details in one place

So what's holding it up? The main problem is fears over security and who's responsible if fraudsters get their hands on all your dosh. For the service to work, you'd have to reveal all your passwords and PINs to one company and most banks and other financial service providers expressly forbid you to do this – so you'd sign up for a data aggregation service at your own peril. Philip Thorpe, managing director of the Financial Services Authority, has warned: 'We cannot guarantee consumers the protection of the regulatory system if something should go wrong'. So there are clearly a lot of issues to be sorted out first, but the good news is that it's looking increasingly inevitable that the major players are going to get together and work out a solution in the near future. Forrester Research has estimated that by 2004, 34 million users worldwide will be logging on to check all their financial details in one place.

Data aggregation may well also be part of Bill Gates' future plans. Microsoft has made little secret of its ambitious .NET project, which would see complete integration between major aspects of online and offline life. In effect, .NET is an intelligent agent which monitors auction sites and makes bids on your behalf, lets you know when your flight's been delayed and books theatre tickets via your mobile. It also entails keeping all your passwords and financial details in one place – effectively trusting Bill and co with the keys to your economic well-being. If the project is successful (and, let's face it, a company that large doesn't often get involved in failures), it will open the door to others.

For the time being, you're stuck with the bog-standard online banks. There's not much to choose between the major banks for functionality, but for design, ease of use, and in honour of their place right in the vanguard of online banking, Barclays gets our thumbs-up. The site has come on leaps and bounds in recent months, with a complete redesign, banishing all the old clunkiness. But if you want an Internet-only bank with the extra savings and slightly higher interest rates that brings, Smile is still the obvious choice.

It's not only the banks that offer essential tools to help you keep on top of your finances. The Desk Top Accountant is head and shoulders above the competition when it comes to dealing with tax issues. It offers a whole host of online services: financial calculators, essential Q&As, jargon busters, and both off-the-peg and made-to-measure accountancy services.

If you're going to do the job properly and sort out your finances once and for all, you're going to need some financial software. There isn't much to choose between to the best packages, Quicken and Microsoft Money: they come in different flavours at different prices, depending on what you need them to do, and both are compatible with many of the online banking services. Finally, you should bookmark the Norwich Union Web site by virtue of its extremely useful range of financial planning tools, calculators and advice – they're giving away free copies of the *FT Guide to Reading the Financial Pages* at the moment, so hurry on over.

SITE CHECKLIST >>

- ***www.barclays.co.uk***
- ***www.smile.co.uk***
- ***www.thedesktopaccountant.com***
- ***www.intuit.co.uk***
- ***www.quicken.com***
- ***www.microsoft.com/uk/homepc/money***
- ***www2.norwichunion.com/tps/financialplanner/financial_planner_index.jhtml***

THE UK'S SURFING HABITS EXPOSED

Your guide to what everyone else is doing online

Ever wondered what everyone else is up to? Where they surf, which equipment they use, how much they spend and where? You'd be a pretty unusual Netizen if you hadn't.

Trouble is, we're swamped with stats on a daily basis, so finding accurate and up to date information can be a problem: which is why we've come up with a definitive list of the most important (and most unusual) facts and figures from Internet Britain 2001.

From the most popular sites to the most popular misspellings of Anna Kournikova's name, this is who – and where – we are today.

And based on what's going on at the moment the future's bright. More and more people are shopping online, other age ranges are discovering its possibilities (the silver surfer phenomenon) and the geeky image has been shed. With broadband starting to impact on the statistics it can't be long before being connected to the Internet is no different to having other utilities (water, gas etc) on tap.

So don your voyeur's cap and join us on a quickfire tour of the surfing nation. You'll be surprised – and you might just be inspired...

The UK's 30 most popular sites (Aug 2000-Aug 2001)

	NAME	URL	PAGE IMPRESSIONS
1	Yahoo!	*www.yahoo.co.uk*	615,099,311
2	Cricinfo.com	*www.cricinfo.com*	254,599,866
3	Rivals.net	*www.rivals.net*	38,842,157
4	ADVFN	*www.advfn.com*	36,279,802
5	AltaVista UK	*uk.altavista.com*	34,058,475
6	Guardian Unlimited	*www.guardian.co.uk*	30,391,093
7	Interactive Investor	*www.iii.co.uk*	27,720,561
8	Auto Trader	*www.autotrader.co.uk*	26,572,466
9	PA Sporting Life	*www.sportinglife.com*	23,843,089
10	Liverpool FC	*www.liverpoolfc.tv*	22,569,978
11	Virgin Net	*www.virgin.net*	19,895,565
12	UK Plus	*www.ukplus.co.uk*	18,409,553
13	MegaStar	*www.megastar.co.uk*	17,521,693
14	Teletext	*www.teletext.co.uk*	13,425,723
15	Moonfruit	*www.moonfruit.com*	12,062,892
16	Rightmove	*www.rightmove.co.uk*	11,710,944
17	This Is London	*www.thisislondon.co.uk*	8,561,051
18	GoJobsite	*www.gojobsite.co.uk*	7,580,574
19	UCAS	*www.ucas.com*	6,127,590
20	British Medical Journal	*www.bmj.com*	5,433,756
21	handbag.com	*www.handbag.com*	5,041,864
22	Stepstone UK	*www.stepstone.co.uk*	4,998,573
23	Parkers Online	*www.parkers.co.uk*	4,653,381
24	This Is Money	*www.thisismoney.co.uk*	4,399,939
25	ShopSmart.com	*www.shopsmart.com*	4,070,874
26	IXM	*www.ixm.co.uk*	3,883,446
27	Iron Maiden	*www.ironmaiden.com*	3,556,366
28	Workthing.com	*www.workthing.com*	3,513,060
29	Prospects	*www.prospects.ac.uk*	2,786,805
30	Babyworld	*www.babyworld.co.uk*	1,367,907

Source: ABC Audits

1 YAHOO!
Nice to see one of the old-school sites still going strong – Yahoo! continues to feature in every traffic statistic, drawing in up to 32 percent of the entire Internet audience.

2 CRICINFO.COM
Nobody could have predicted the success of this sports portal. Thanks to the inclusion of online ball-by-ball commentary, CricInfo has quickly become loved by office workers.

7 INTERACTIVE INVESTOR
The ability to trade and then monitor shares online has surely been one of the success stories of the last year. This site leads the charge with a clean design and great content.

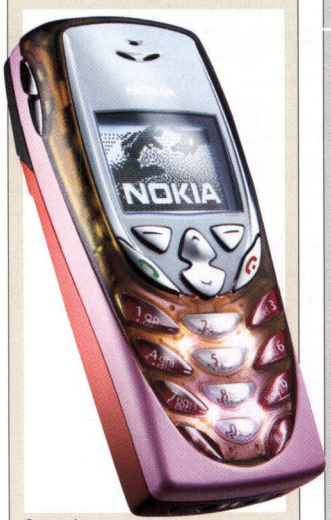
13 MEGASTAR
Megastar is proof that the demographic is changing to closely mirror the offline world – out there the tabloids rule the ratings, and it looks like they will online, too.

21 HANDBAG.COM
The proportion of women getting online continues to grow, as evidenced by this girly portal.

Top 10 mobile phone searches

Mobile	111,351
Ringtones	103,940
Text	99,376
Nokia	96,634
SMS	91,386
Messages	75,546
Phone	73,433
Tones	59,654
Logos	58,189
Ring	50,809

SMS is merely a cut-down version of email – so it's not that surprising to see the two converging in surfers' affections.



Source: Lycos

Top 10 travel destinations

London	150,657
Ireland	45,256
Scotland	44,255
Manchester	39,939
England	36,423
Edinburgh	24,930
York	24,803
Glasgow	24,617
Birmingham	24,287
Wales	24,259

Not a huge surprise to see London at the top of the list, but it's interesting to note that Manchester got more searches than England as a whole.

Source: Lycos

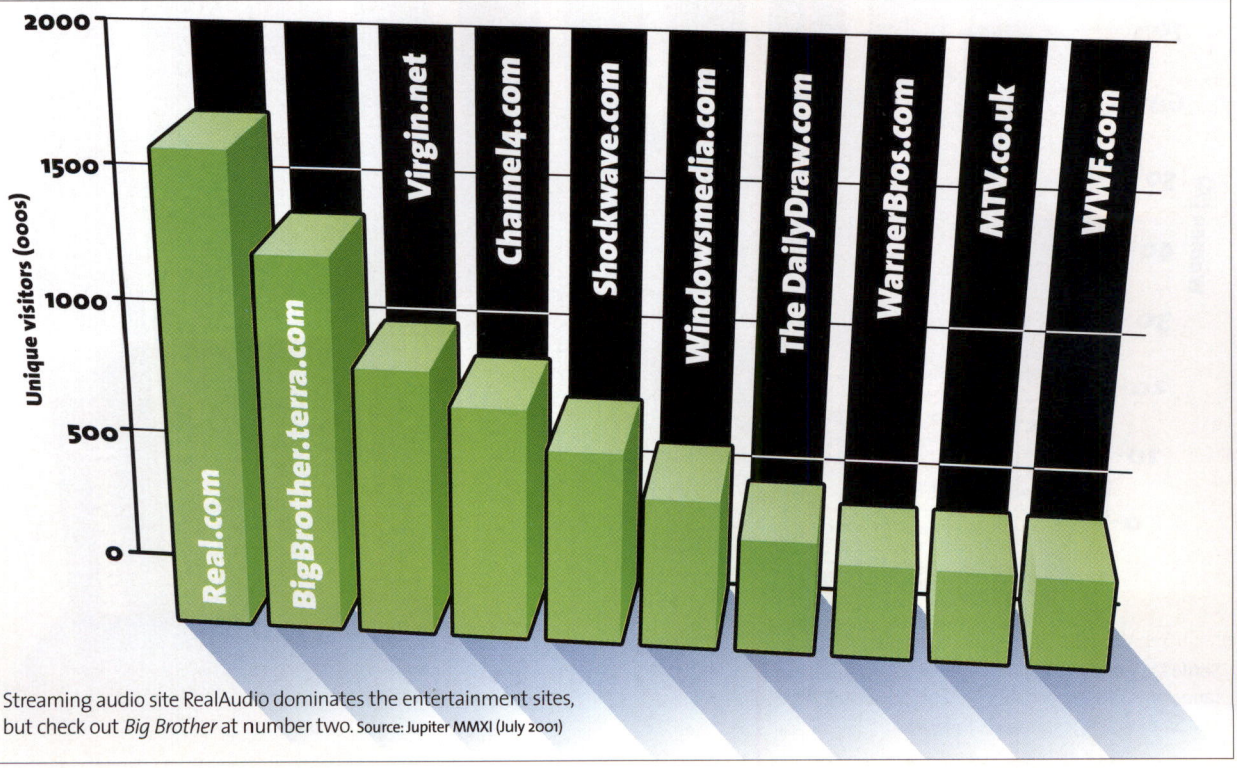
Top 20 domains in the UK

RANK	SITES	UNIQUE VISITORS
1	MSN.com	6,810,000
2	Yahoo.com	5,196,000
3	Microsoft.com	4,726,000
4	Freeserve.com	4,526,000
5	Passport.com	4,379,000
6	MSN.co.uk	4,266,000
7	MSN Messenger	3,275 ,000
8	Yahoo.co.uk	3,174,000
9	BBC.co.uk	2,906,000
10	AOL proprietary	2,810,000
11	AskJeeves.co.uk	2,785,000
12	Lycos.com	2,276,000
13	BTinternet.com	2,263,000
14	Google.com	2,170,000
15	AOL.co.uk	2,034,000
16	Lycos.co.uk	1,986,000
17	AOL.com	1,748,000
18	Real.com	1,686,000
19	X10.com	1,581,000
20	Amazon.co.uk	1,496,000

When we look at the findings of Internet research company Jupiter MMXI (based on visitors but not audited like ABC magazine figures) we see the total and complete dominance of the portals – note that five of the top 10 are Microsoft creations.

Source: Jupiter MMXI (June 2001)

Top 10 entertainment sites



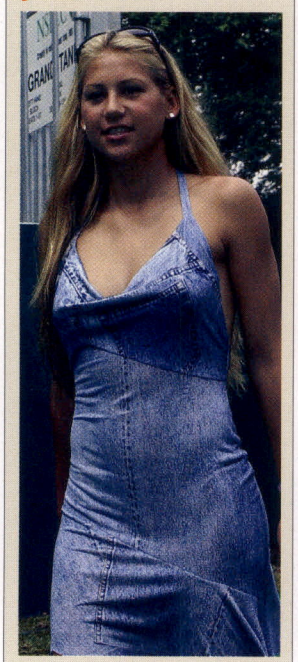
Streaming audio site RealAudio dominates the entertainment sites, but check out *Big Brother* at number two. Source: Jupiter MMXI (July 2001)

WORDS: ANDY HUTCHINSON; PHOTOS: REX, STONE, PA; ILLUSTRATIONS: PETER LIDDIARD, DAVID SEMPLE

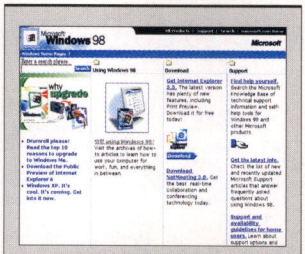
STATE OF THE NATION

Top five ways to misspell Anna Kournikova

1 Anna Kornakova
2 Anna Kournicova
3 Anna Kurnikova
4 Anna Kournakova
5 Ana Kornikova



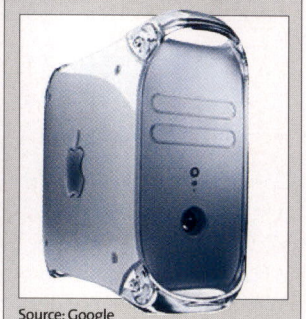
Source: Lycos



Most popular operating system

Windows 98	55%
Windows NT	25%
Windows 95	11%
Macintosh	4%
Linux	1%
Other	4%

Pretty much as expected: Microsoft supplies the operating systems used by 91 percent of all Internet users.



Source: Google

Top 10 e-commerce sites

RANK	URL	UNIQUE VISITORS
1	*amazon.co.uk*	1,486,000
2	*amazon.com*	1,171,000
3	*tesco.com*	849,000
4	*lastminute.com*	681,000
5	*argos.co.uk*	676,000
6	*britannia-music.co.uk*	449,000
7	*expedia.co.uk*	423,000
8	*streetsonline.co.uk*	392,000
9	*comet.co.uk*	359,000
10	*thomascook.com*	325,000

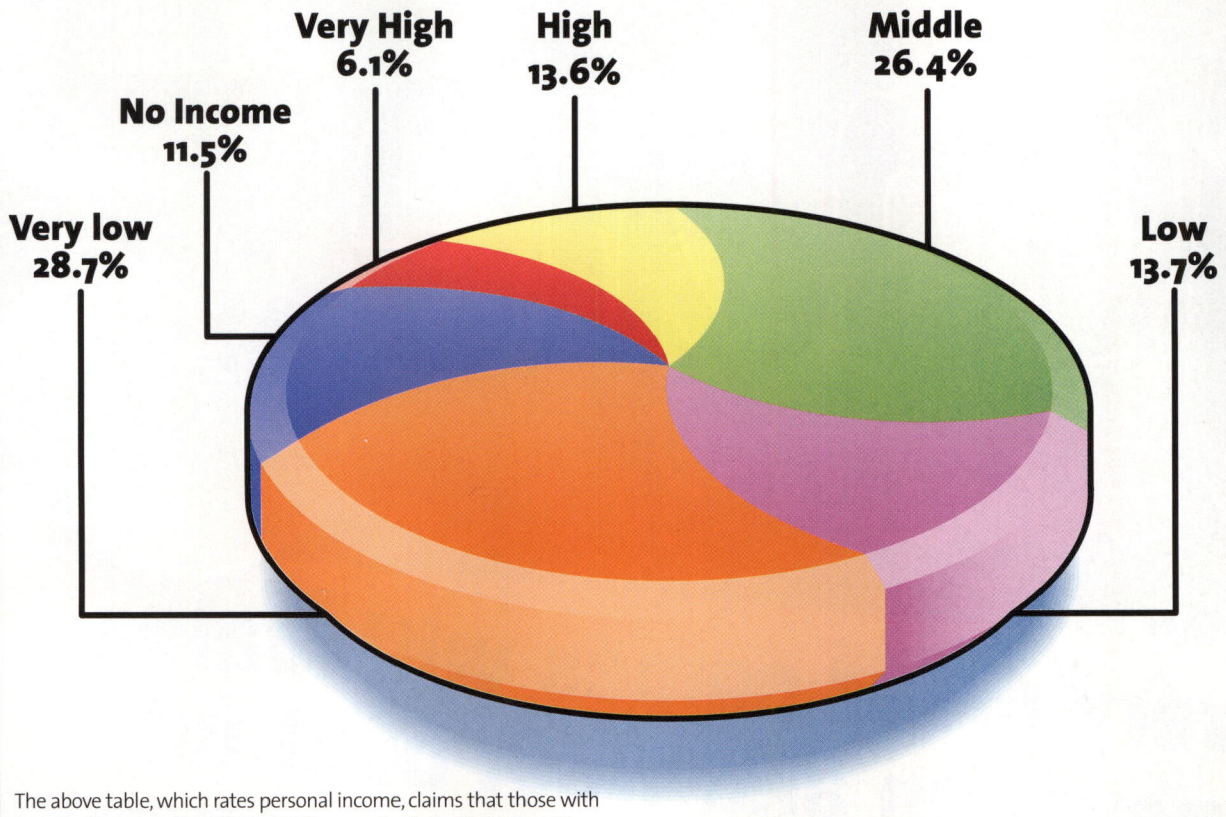
Amazon, even its US arm, dominates the e-commerce market, though Tesco is making strong headway flying the British flag.

Source: NetValue (August 2001)

Top 10 sites accessed by women

Some truly odd entries in there. BlueMountain, however, with its range of eCards is probably the least surprising. Nice to see Marks and Sparks riding high. Source: Jupiter MMXI

How wealthy are the nation's surfers?



The above table, which rates personal income, claims that those with 'very low' incomes (described as £18,000 or less) dominate the UK market, outnumbering the middle class. Source: NetValue

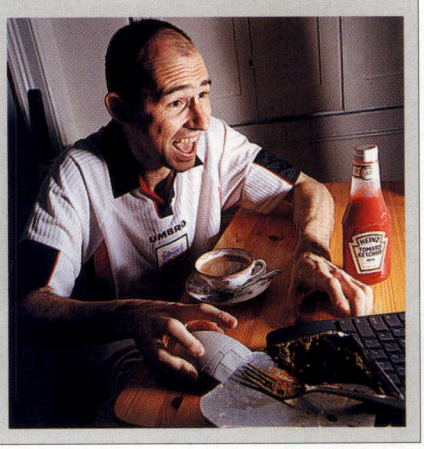
Gender of UK surfers

Men continue to dominate Internet usage in this country (with 57.8 percent of the total), but women are slowly but surely gaining ground with 42.2 percent. Source: NetValue

Occupations of UK surfers

Professional (eg lawyer, architect)	12.8%
Business proprietor	5.8%
General management	5.3%
Middle management	8.4%
Other non-manual employee/manual worker	26.8%
Retired	7.2%
Student	21.5%
Unemployed	12.2%

These statistics are pretty much as expected: however, check out the last category which indicates that the Internet is now the plaything of resting actors everywhere.



Source: NetValue

Banner ads

Banner clickers (%)	33.2
Banner clickers (000s)	4,616
Average number of ads viewed per month	223.9
Average number of distinct ads per user	89.8
Average number of times an ad is repeated	2.5

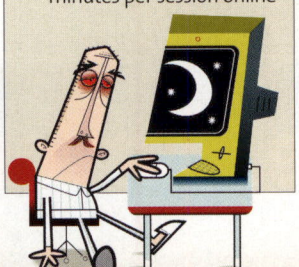
According to these figures, a third of us regularly click on ads – and we have to look at 223 of the things every month.

Source: NetValue

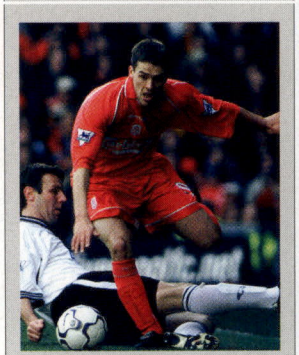
Time online

Every month the average Internet user:

- Goes online 9.2 times
- Visits an average of 45 different sites
- Views an average of 354 pages
- Spends roughly 20 minutes per session online



Top online sports



SPORT	SEARCHES
Football	72,968
Golf	44,837
WWF	30,295
Cricket	22,935
Fishing	19,651
Rugby	19,359
Wrestling	15,219
Cycling	11,840
Tennis	10,253
Soccer	10,253
Swimming	10,041

Judging by the number of times we search for a sport on Lycos per month, it seems we're all golf and grapple fans.

Source: Lycos

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EPS603	STYLUS PHOTO 895 A4 2880D	£148.00	£173.90
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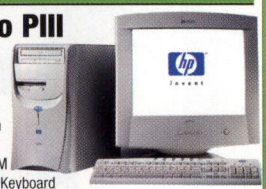

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3CM250	PALM VX 8MB	£194.89	£229.00
PAL033	PALM M105 8MB PDA	£125.00	£146.88
PAL015	PALM M100 2MB PALM OS 3.5	£98.00	£115.15
PAL038	PALM M500/505 PORTABLE KE	£83.56	£98.18

SOFTWARE

MicroSoft Works Suite 2001

Stock code: MS3818

£99.99 inc vat

		EX VAT	INC VAT
ADO427	ACROBAT V5.0 (WIN)	£170.20	£199.99
ADO328	PHOTOSHOP V6 PC	£459.56	£539.98
AUT497	AUTOCAD LT 2002	£470.00	£552.25
AUT490	AUTOCAD LT 2000I	£460.00	£540.50
DIG123	PAINT SHOP PRO V7	£68.08	£79.99
MAC287	DREAMWEAVER 4.0 (WIN)	£226.37	£265.98
MAC403	DIRECTOR SHOCKWAVE STUDIO	£906.37	£1,064.98
MAC279	DREAMWEAVER V4 & FIREWORK	£349.00	£410.08
MAC375	WEB STUDENT BUNDLE	£221.27	£259.99
MS4014	STUDENT LIC DESKTOP 2001	£90.65	£106.51
MS4452	OFFICE XP PROFESSIONAL	£265.00	£311.38
MS3841	STDNT LIC DSKTP 2000SR	£104.99	£123.36
MS1492	OFFICE 2000 STD CV/UPG	£159.99	£187.99
MS1479	FRONTPAGE 2000	£89.45	£105.10
MS3596	PROJECT 2000 CD	£328.62	£386.13
MS3433	WINDOWS PRO 2000 PUP CCP	£152.99	£179.76
MS3846	WINDOWS ME/2000 PRO STUDE	£38.18	£44.86
MS1467	OFFICE 2000 PRO CV/UPGRAD	£230.00	£270.25
MS3768	OFFICE 2000 PREMIUM UG	£231.15	£271.60
MS4449	OFFICE XP PROFESSIONAL	£220.00	£258.50
MS3652	VISUAL STUDENT DEV EDU	£65.31	£76.74
MS4450	OFFICE XP PROFESSIONAL	£439.99	£516.99
MS4448	OFFICE XP STANDARD VER	£159.00	£186.83
MS4451	OFFICE XP STANDARD	£345.52	£405.99
MS3818	WORKS SUITE 2001	£85.10	£99.99
MS3389	WINDOWS PROFESSIONAL 2000	£229.00	£269.08
QUA197	QUARKEXPRESS V4.1 WIN	£900.00	£1,057.50
ADA200	EASY CD CREATOR V5.0 PLAT	£34.03	£39.99
SYM926	NORTON ANTIVIRUS 2001 7.0	£25.52	£29.99
SY1200	PC ANYWHERE V10.0 H&R	£119.00	£139.83
SY1251	NORTON ANTIVIRUS 2001 & P	£31.96	£37.55

A member of the Argos Retail Group

PC Products • Music • Video • Games
Mobile Phones • Home Cinema • Audio/DVD

jungle.com

Happy snaps

Breathe life into your pics with the new wave of Net-friendly digital cameras

IN APRIL 2001, HIGH STREET GIANT Dixons reported that digital cameras had outsold their film-based counterparts for the first time in history. It was a milestone for photography. With camera prices falling to below £100, the temptation to get on board the digital train has never been greater.

The appeal of the format is obvious: there's the lack of development costs, the ease with which you can get images onto your computer and the ability to preview your shots and delete any compromising images before they make it into the family album. What's more, emailing photographs and creating online photo galleries is simply the best way to share pictures with friends and family the world over.

However, digital cameras still come at a premium – to get anyway near the quality of a 35mm camera, you'll need to spend at least £300. This is because the cameras at the low end of the market usually capture images of with a resolution of 640 x 480 – meaning the finished photos contain around 300,000 pixels. If you're just emailing a few holiday snaps to jealous friends, this may be enough. But if you're planning to make prints with a inkjet printer or through an online photo service such as ***www.fotango.com***, results will be disappointing unless you have a camera with a resolution of over a million pixels (or one 'megapixel').

Still, there's a whole raft of decently-priced, easily-workable and effortlessly effective digital cameras out there, and we've rounded up some of the newest and most exciting to present you with the pick of the bunch. Get snapping...

FUJIFILM FINEPIX 50I £500

★★★★★

PROS Tiny; great pictures; MP3 playback
CONS No zoom; not enough memory for MP3s

At less than an inch thick, Fujifilm's latest digital darling looks more like a MiniDisc player than a camera – and the inclusion of headphones and MP3 playback heightens this illusion. Fortunately, photographic functions haven't been neglected – Fuji's SuperCCD image capture chip produces stunning results with resolutions of up to 4.3 megapixels. There are a few compromises, though; there's no zoom lens, the menu system is a bit of a pain to navigate and the buttons are poorly laid out. More frustratingly, the supplied 16Mb memory card will only allow you to store about 15 minutes of music – and that's if you don't take any pictures. But these are minor quibbles, offset by the 50i's quality, compact size and docking/recharging station. The software package is easy to use and, though it lacks animage editor, includes Videoimpression, which lets you edit movies using 30-second clips.

MEMORY 16Mb Smartmedia
BEST RESOLUTION 4.3 megapixel (2400 x 1800)
FEATURES MP3 playback, video
www.fujifilm.co.uk

WORDS: TOM DUNMORE; PICTURES: NICK WRIGHT

KODAK DX3600 £350

★★★★★

PROS Easy to use; great value
CONS Design not to everyone's taste

Everything about the DX3600 screams 'fun', from the wacky plastic case design to the colourful easy to use menus on the bright LCD screen. But don't be deceived into thinking this is a kids' camera – although the 2.2 million pixel resolution isn't top of the range, the colour reproduction and image quality were up there with the best. The only poor results came in low light conditions. The DX3600 comes with a docking station, so you don't have to waste time fiddling with leads at the back of your computer every time you want to download pictures – as well as taking most of the trouble out of the whole uploading/downloading process many new camera owners find such a tricky experience, it also makes recharging batteries a cinch. Like the camera, the supplied software for PC and Mac is simple but remarkably easy to use. If you want to do anything more than turn pictures sepia or get rid of red eye, you'll need to look for some specialist software, but getting your pictures online and printed by Kodak is a breeze. Far more effective than many pricier options, and comes with the best brand name in the business, too, so you can be sure you're getting value for money into the bargain.

MEMORY 8Mb built in, Compact Flash slot for extra
BEST RESOLUTION 2.2 megapixel (1800 x 1200)
FEATURES 2x optical zoom, video
www.kodak.co.uk

KYOCERA FINECAM S3 £550

★★★★☆

PROS Excellent image quality; compact design; feature-packed
CONS Expensive; poor video quality; complex menu system

Just because you haven't heard of Kyocera doesn't mean it is a photographic Johnny-come-lately – it's actually the parent company of Contax, one of the most respected names in photography. Accordingly, the Finecam S3 is no cheap and cheerful import – it's a solidly-constructed and stylish camera with enough manual functions to make it appeal to the serious photographer. Even if aperture priority and exposure compensation mean nothing to you, you couldn't fail to be impressed by the top-resolution pictures the Kyocera produces. Unfortunately the resulting files, when uncompressed, are so big that you can only fit one on the supplied 16Mb card. Still, compression gives you more space, and the range of image quality options should cater for all needs. Once the pictures have been taken, downloading to a PC or Mac is quick and easy with the supplied card reader, which fools your computer into thinking it's a disk full of jpegs. This is a novel alternative to the docking station; it's just as quick and easy, but only takes up a tiny amount of space on your desk and has the added benefit of working with any MultiMediaCards – making it ideal if you've got a MMC-based MP3 player or PDA. On the down side, the Finecam's movie feature produced disappointing results, and at this price you would expect better image editing software – serious users will love the camera, but would do well to consider buying Adobe's Photoshop Elements software (£90) to make the most of it.

MEMORY 16Mb MultiMediaCard
BEST RESOLUTION 3.3 megapixel (2048 x 1536)
FEATURES Video, 2x optical zoom
www.kyocera.co.uk

OLYMPUS C-1 ZOOM £300

★★★☆☆

PROS Cheap; easy to use
CONS No video; disappointing picture quality; no rechargeable batteries

If you're familiar with compact film cameras, the C-1 Zoom might seem like a natural step into digital photography. It's from an extremely respected manufacturer, it looks and works like a 35mm point-and-shooter, it's not hugely expensive and it has the benefits of a built-in LCD screen and quick PC connection. Pictures, however, are what matters – and here the C1-zoom really wasn't up to the standards of the competition. The maximum resolution of 1.2 million pixels isn't anywhere near cutting edge, but it should be more than enough for emailing snaps or producing 6x4" prints. However, the colours seemed muted when we put it to the test and the flash often caused the subject to appear bleached. Fiddling with the white balance and exposure compensation helped resolve this, but such a workaround hardly fits in with the camera's point-and-shoot ethos. The lack of rechargeable batteries and disappointing selection of accompanying software only compounds the feeling that this is an opportunity missed.

MEMORY 8Mb SmartMedia
BEST RESOLUTION 1.2 megapixel (1280 x 960)
FEATURES 3x optical zoom
www.olympus.co.uk

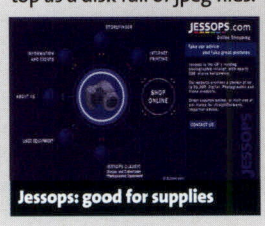
YOU'VE BOUGHT A DIGITAL CAMERA – BUT WHAT NEXT?

DIGITAL SNAPS MADE EASY »

■ INVEST IN MORE MEMORY
Most cameras come with 8 or 16MB of memory – enough for just a handful of shots at the highest resolution. Look for deals on higher-capacity cards from the likes of ***www.picstop.co.uk***.

■ GET SNAPPING
For tips and tricks, check out ***www.shortcourses.com***.

■ DOWNLOAD PICTURES TO YOUR PC
Most cameras are compatible with Mac and PC and come with software for downloading pictures, but consider buying a card reader (around £30). These are fast and convenient, staying linked to your USB port at all times – when you insert a card it appears on your desktop as a disk full of jpeg files.



Jessops: good for supplies

Jessops (***www.jessops.com***) offers a good selection.

■ EDIT THE PHOTOS
Fun packages such as Goo (***www.scansoft.com***) allow you to perform some nifty distortion tricks, but for serious editing, it's hard to beat the brilliant Photoshop Elements (£90) from ***www.adobe.com***.

■ PUBLISH ON THE WEB
Yahoo! offers the top online photo service at ***photos.yahoo.com***, but if you take a digital memory card into Boots you can pay around £6 to have all the pictures on it turned into old-fashioned prints – and have the digital images uploaded to ***www.bootsphoto.com*** free.

Let the Web do your shopping

The trouble with e-commerce is the overwhelming choice – which is why comparison sites claim to do the hard work for you and save cash, too. We put them to the test...

ONE OF THE MOST APPEALING THINGS about shopping online is the promise of big savings. Yes, you may have to wait a few days to get that cherished DVD, book or crate of champagne delivered. And yes, perhaps the choice at that online toy store isn't quite up to the selection of the Toys 'R' Us just outside town. But if we can save a few pounds – and a lot of hassle, too – by clicking rather than queuing, many of us are more than happy to put up with these minor inconveniences.

It's no surprise, then, that a whole host of sites have popped up promising to save money. These sites don't sell anything themselves, they just hope to make our online shopping experience easier and cheaper by searching the Net and reporting back to us with the cheapest place to buy whatever it is we want. Not via email in a day or so, either: the best sites out there present you with a selection of shopping options mere seconds after you've put the question to them. Sounds good? Well it is, but being a sceptical breed, many people think there must be a drawback to something so good. And while it's true that no price comparison site is perfect, some are significantly less flawed than others.

It's no surprise that a host of sites are claiming to save you cash

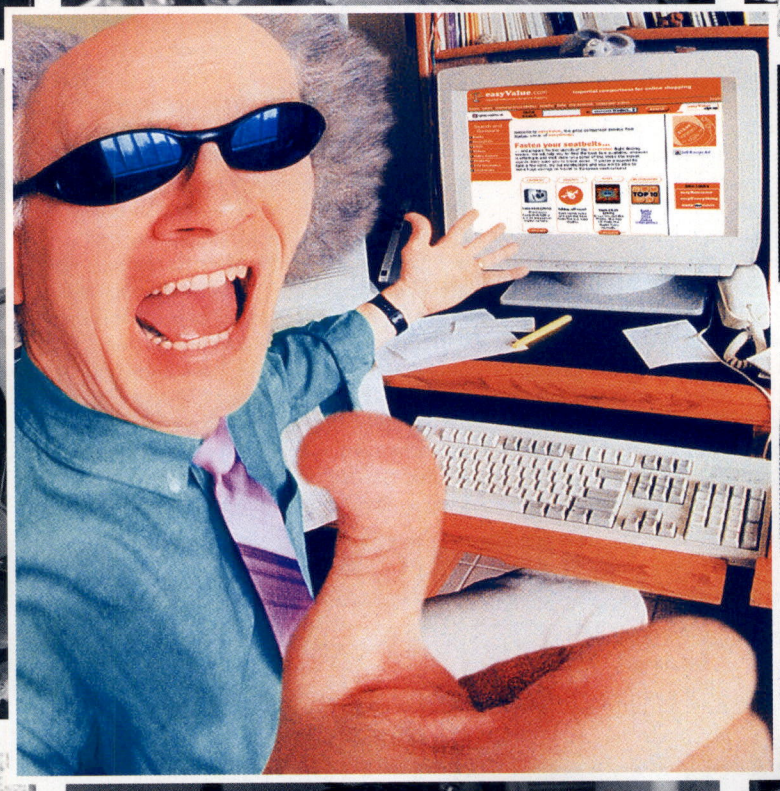
The major problem with operations such as ShopSmart, Kelkoo and any of the others in the table overleaf is that none of them actually does what many people expect them to do. Sadly, they don't trawl through the whole vastness of the Internet, searching in every nook and delving into every cranny in an attempt to find the best deals. What really happens is that they search a select group of stores, some of which may have struck deals with the price comparison site in question to become part of the search process (though this doesn't in any way mean the results given to you are fundamentally wrong or biased).

Most price comparison sites fall into two categories: what we'll call the Walled Garden and the Tsunami. The larger Walled Garden group of sites are usually database-driven and have software installed on the sites they search to return information on pricing and stock availability. These sites are limited to a certain number of shops in each area – for example, searching for a CD on ShopSmart >>

WORDS: SHAUN MARIN; PICTURES: CORBIS, IMAGEBANK

ADVERTISED

SALE


easyValue.com
Fasten your seatbelts...

PORTMEIRION

Aqua Fresh
Colgate Precision
Colgate Plus
Oral-B Advantage
Oral-B
Reach
Lactona
Tek
Butler
Dentrust
Crest Complete

Comparison: human nature

will bring at best nine results – depending on how many sites are signed up to the scheme at any one time.

The fact that these sites limit their search to a specific group of stores adds to the public perception that they are not really getting the best deal. However, as you can see from the results table, sites such as Beeb, ShopSmart and easyValue, which fall into this category, often produce limited but good results – and they will save you money on the amount you would otherwise have paid had you simply settled for the first few sites you came across in an ordinary search.

The second price comparison type is the Tsunami. Sites such as Kelkoo almost wash you away with wave after wave of results. You usually have to trawl through quite a few irrelevant listings to find what you're looking for – sometimes it feels like you're using Google rather than a dedicated price comparison service.

But Kelkoo is still doing very well for itself, suggesting that people trust it simply because it brings up so many results, giving them the satisfaction that the search engine has worked harder for them, even though they then have to put in more effort at their end to find the right price.

Another public perception that needs to be quashed before these sites really make it big – as we think some deserve to – is that when you get to the price comparison screen, clicking on the link to the store automatically buys the product. This is not the case. Many newer Web users seem to think there's some magical way of getting their credit card details if they press this dreaded button. Fear not: once you go through to the other site you still have to go through the usual buying process there – you've merely used the comparison site as a gateway.

You can set a limit on prices to narrow searches

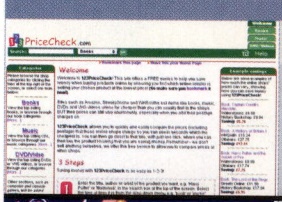
We decided to put the comparison sites to the test by searching for a spread of popular products: Dido's *No Angel* CD, JK Rowling's latest Harry Potter paperback *The Goblet of Fire*, and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* on Region 2 DVD.

We also threw in a couple of trickier propositions: US country band The Handsome Family's *In The Air* CD – to check on the site's back catalogue search ability and the breadth of its searching – and a Toshiba SD210 DVD player, although we never expected all the sites to come through with this as many of them concentrate almost entirely on the holy e-commerce trinity of books, music and films.

Generally, the big players put in the best performances, whether they were of the Walled Garden or Tsunami type. So sites such as ShopSmart and the very impressive

HOW DO THE COMPARISON SITES SHAPE UP?

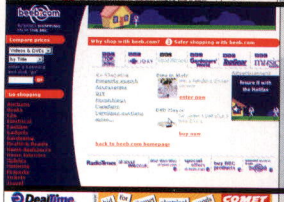
NAME	HANDSOME FAMILY	DIDO	CROUCHING TIGER	HARRY POTTER	TOSHIBA DVD
123 PRICE CHECK	£11.53 (3)*	£11.47 (3)	£17.73 (3)	£6.24 (13)	n/a



www.123pricecheck.com

This basic and friendly-looking site is better at searching for books than either CDs or DVDs, providing us with far more competitive results in this area. We quite liked the flashing 'Working' sign as well – just to let you know things are happening if it's all taking a while. However, the sign was an admission of guilt because it did take an age to return the results.

BEEB	£11.53 (4)	£10.98 (3)	n/a	£6.24 (3)	n/a



www.beeb.com

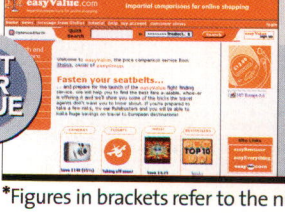
Auntie gets in on the price comparison game with this site based around the broadcasting giant's TV programmes and magazines. So, for example, if you search for CDs, you do it in the *Top Of The Pops* section of the site. The stores searched are limited, but there's plenty of information and extra value content there as well.

DEALTIME UK	£11.53 (5)	£8.99 (3)	£15.99 (6)	£6.24 (7)	£189.99 (6)

www.dealtime.co.uk

DealTime is a major player in the US price comparison market, and it's been up and running in the UK for about a year now. Books, CDs and DVD are all catered for and the site also has an impressive electronics section plus loads of other areas. Annoyingly, some of the product searches don't give the full price with P&P which makes it look deceptively cheap at first.

EASYVALUE	£10 (9)	£8.99 (10)	£15.99 (9)	£5.45 (11)	£188.95 (1)



BEST FOR VALUE

www.easyvalue.com

As you'd expect from any Web site that's part of the Easy group – easyJet etc – the predominant colour here is bright orange. The most impressive thing about this site was that it broke the trend and produced a price for the Harry Potter book that wasn't £6.24, instead coming up with an amazing £5.45. It was also cheapest on all but one of the other categories.

*Figures in brackets refer to the number of searches returned for each product.

easyValue gave tightly-controlled results across a select number of stores. Kelkoo, meanwhile, threw up endless matches, even after narrowing down the search in the supplied boxes – for example, title and artist with CDs – which can be annoying. With *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* we specified DVD, but Kelkoo still gave us returns for VHS, which threw us for quite a while. You can set an upper limit on price, though, which allows you to narrow the results down further.

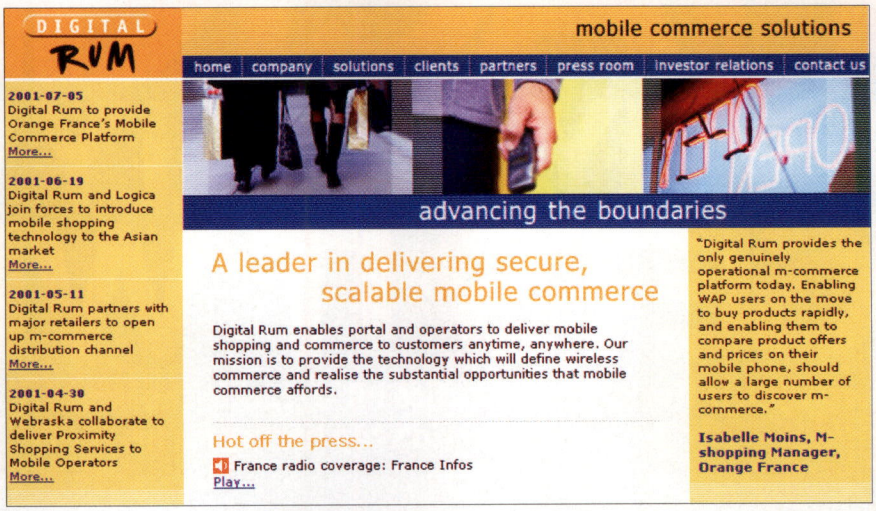
If you're worried about the Walled Garden sites being in some way rigged, one look at the results table should dispel that concern. As you can see, all the sites threw up pretty similar results as far as pricing goes, with the Harry Potter price coming in at the same bar the notable exception of the easyValue site.

So does this mean all the sites are the same, that it doesn't matter which one you use? Well, sort of, but there's more to it than that. There is the issue of speed, for starters, and some sites such as 123pricecheck and Beeb were noticeably sluggish compared to easyValue.

Also, Kelkoo, while relatively speedy at producing results, ends up slower because you have to read through endless results to make sure you're not missing out on a real bargain on the very last page. Ordering the results by price or type would be a major step forward for the site. Shopping comparison sites, then, can be a mixed bag, but they can act as a great surfing tool if you're determined to save money and willing to give them a try – and if you're wondering where to get started, check the table below against your shopping needs...

GETTING A RUM DEAL

THE WEB SERVICES THAT HELP YOU IN THE HIGH STREET



Online price comparison is all very well if you've got the time to boot up your PC, log on to a Web site, find what you're looking for and then click through and buy it from yet another site. But in the middle of a bookshop on Oxford Street you're not going to have time to do that as you decide whether to purchase that impulse buy or wait a few days and get it cheaper via the Net.

That's where digitalRUM (***www.digitalrum.com***) comes in, or at least will do when the next generation of mobile phones arrives. This company provides a service that allows you to check prices and make purchases via a mobile phone while you're in the high street. It already has deals in place with Virgin Mobile and Mviva in the UK to provide a new service that will allow you to check prices and even make the final purchase there and then. Basically, when you're viewing a product in real life, you can type the details into your GPRS phone and receive details on the cheapest online prices for the same product – which gives you great haggling power – or even info on other high street stores' prices, enabling you to nip down the road and buy it more cheaply. It could well validate the very existence of GPRS .

In the meantime, you might have to content yourself with the likes of What's On Sale (***www.whatsonsale.co.uk***), which claims to compare high street prices on the Web.

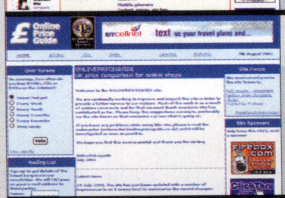
BEST FOR CHOICE

NAME	HANDSOME FAMILY	DIDO	CROUCHING TIGER	HARRY POTTER	TOSHIBA DVD
KELKOO	£11.53 (37)	£8.99 (12)	£16.24 (9)	£6.24 (69)	£193.87 (3)

www.uk.kelkoo.com

As you can see from the table, Kelkoo throws up an incredible number of results when searching. Unfortunately, they're not all relevant and it takes time to sift through them. For example, for the Handsome Family CD, even though we put the title of the album in the search box, it still threw up all their other albums as well.

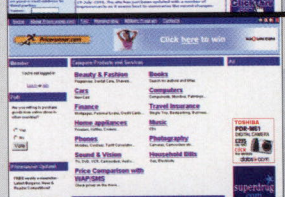
ONLINE PRICE GUIDE	n/a	£8.99 (7)	£13.99 (8)	£6.24 (5)	n/a



www.onlinepriceguide.co.uk

This basic but efficient site concentrates on returning price comparison results for books, CDs and DVDs. Again, it's database-driven, but seems to lack the power of the impressive Muze music database of ShopSmart and Beeb.com. So there wasn't a sniff of the Handsome Family, though returns for DVDs are excellent thanks to inclusion of Play247's database.

PRICERUNNER	£12.39 (3)	£8.99 (4)	n/a	£6.24 (7)	£190.96 (4)



www.uk.pricerunner.com

This site is simple to operate, but the results it throws up from its database are often confusing. Our book search used a beta version of the software, which annoyingly didn't provide any P&P details, and on CDs it didn't add them up for you. The search also took longer than on many of the others here and needed a lot of further refining to find definitive results.

SHOPSMART	£11.48 (7)	£9.48 (9)	£15.99 (9)	£6.24 (8)	£189.95 (5)

www.shopsmart.com

Recently re-branded and redesigned to reflect the site's new partnership with Barclaycard, ShopSmart has a powerful search engine, and although limited in the number of sites searched, the results are accurate and cheap. As well as the categories here, it also has price comparison on computer hardware and software and a large number of buying guides and articles.

HACKING: WHY HOLLYWOOD GETS IT WRONG

Swordfish is the latest box office hit to tackle the world of hacking, but does it pass the insider's test? We ask the world's top hacker for his verdict, and check out the competition

PICTURES: KOBAL COLLECTION

***Swordfish*: Travolta, Jackman and Berry get hacking**

HOLLYWOOD HAS ALWAYS BEEN obsessed with new technology: from the day-glo, flashing world of the seminal *Tron* to the complex systems of *Mission: Impossible*, messing around on a laptop has always been considered sexy and subversive by movie-makers.

Yet the world's greatest producers have consistently failed to capture the world of hacking and the Internet with any degree of realism, the flashing graphics of Sandra Bullock's dismal *The Net* being a case in point. The latest hack-flick off the conveyor belt is *Swordfish* ('Log On. Hack in. Go anywhere. Steal everything'), a box office smash which sees John Travolta persuade ace hacker Hugh Jackman to steal from the government with Halle Berry's help.

The real hackers, however, are distinctly unimpressed. We asked Dr-K, founder of the P/H-UK hacking ezine and author of *A Complete Hacker's Handbook* (Carlton Books, £6.99) to give us the lowdown...

'*Swordfish* does for hacking what *Zulu* did for race relations'

What did you think of *Swordfish*?
It does for hacking what *Zulu* did for race relations. The hacking is just an excuse to propel the plot along: really, it could have been about a safe-cracker or anything. Technically, I found it amusing. I can't believe that anyone would store all their important software on an obsolete machine in the basement, for example. Much of the techno-speak sounds impressive to a layman but it was inaccurate and the screen displays were hopeless – a load of source code flies by your eyes. I can't believe anyone could type that quickly. The graphics were pretty impressive, though.

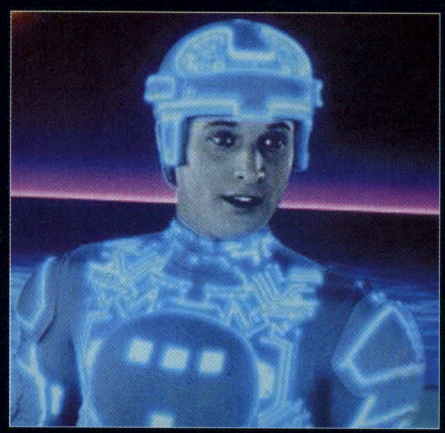
Why does Hollywood get hacking so wrong?
Because it's very hard to make real hacking interesting. It's tedious to show someone sitting there staring at a screen for an hour and a half, smoking B&Hs, so you have to dress things up. Hollywood has created a hacker 'menace' and given the FBI and the military an excuse to train people up for computer warfare. In reality, most of what's called hacking is just kids messing around. Most of what's really menacing is purely criminal – it's easier to rob a bank physically than to hack into it. Most real criminals just wouldn't bother.

Who are 'real' hackers, then?
Most of them are young, male and live for computers. They like the status, in the same way grafitti artists do. They tend to work alone – they'll come out and socialise with other hackers, but they won't work with them. The people who are really into it eventually get corporate jobs and get paid well for their skills.

HIGHS AND LOWS IN TECHNO FILM LAND

A HISTORY OF WIRED MOVIES>>

TRON (1982)



Jeff Bridges plays a hacker sucked into a virtual computer world, complete with day-glo special effects and dubious gladitorial combat. Revered by many techies as the first truly techno-aware Hollywood flick. 'I really like it as a film,' says Dr-K. 'Jeff Bridges is close to the real hacker ethic, creating things for fun.'
alien.sciflicks.com/tron

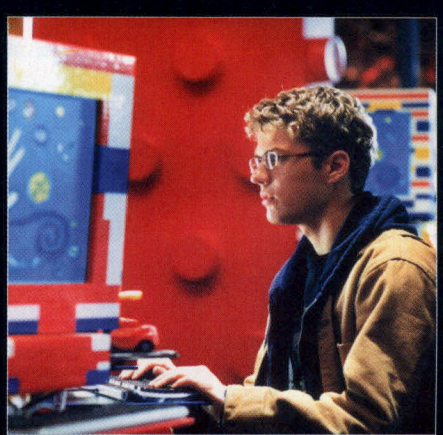
WAR GAMES (1983)

Well-regarded, if slightly outdated, hacker flick which sees an inquisitive young boy log onto a system which controls the US defence system. For a laugh, he sparks an inter-continental war from his bedroom. Technically it frequently defies belief, but it's harmless enough fun.
www-public.rz.uni-duesseldorf.de/~ritterd/wargames/logon.htm

HACKERS (1995)

Laughable B-movie starring Jonny Lee Miller and Angelina Jolie which is still painful today. Supposedly a hi-tech love story, *Hackers* features a group of clued-up teens uncovering an evil plot to unleash a deadly virus on the world. Can they stop it? Will Jonny get the girl? Who cares?
www.mgm.com/hackers

ANTITRUST (2001)



Billed as the most realistic hacking film ever, *Antitrust* has divided the critics but gets a thumbs up from the techie community. The head of a huge computer conglomerate (are you sitting comfortably, Mr Gates?) hatches a plan to take over the world; a lowly employee must stop him.
www.antitrustthemovie.com

SIDEKICK SCHNAPPS DRINKS £2.49

Drinking and construction isn't normally advisable, but Sidekicks (from ***www.asda.com***) positively encourage it. Available in four flavours – apple, cranberry, vanilla and peach – these schnapps shots come in packs of four individual containers. When the drinks are downed you can attempt Lego-like constructions by clipping the glasses together. We emptied enough to construct a life-size Eiffel Tower.

FLOATING GLOBE £200

Magnets are the secret of the floating globe, an incredibly detailed orb which hangs suspended between its plastic arms. Delivery in two working days from ***www.iwantoneofthose.com***.

Retailtherapy»

:// The ultimate coffee table, the latest drinking craze – and black socks

PLANET OF THE APES COLLECTION £10-£25

The worlds of film, beer, wine and letter opening have collided to produce the *Planet of the Apes* pewter collection. Not as cute as the *Simpsons* collection, but if the film is a success they'll be equally desired. Delivery within five days from ***www.gadgetshoponline.com***.

BLACK SOCKS £45 FOR NINE PAIRS

It's the item most overlooked by the single male shopper – yes, the humble black sock is oft-forgotten in the weekly shop. That's where ***www.blacksocks.com*** comes in; £45 gets you a yearly 'sockscription' of nine pairs, dispatched to your door every four months. Up the stakes by shelling out £88 for 18 pairs. A big hit on the Continent, apparently, and now heading over here...

DATAMAX WATCH £350

Swiss-made timepieces offer a sure sign of quality craftsmanship but not always good taste – this Hugo Boss effort, however, combines the two effortlessly. Buy online at ***www.ernestjones.co.uk***.

WORDS: STEVE CLEMENS; PHOTOGRAPHY: CHRIS RENNIE

ZIPPO LIGHTERS HOLLYWOOD COLLECTION £27-£35

You'd be astounded by the hundreds of designs you can choose from when buying a Zippo lighter. Alongside older classics, ***www.walshbrothers.co.uk*** has the latest additions to the range – Elvis, Marilyn and James Dean.

FUJI INSTAX 10 CAMERA £60

The slimline Fuji instax produces instant, high quality, credit card-sized photos at the touch of a button. It comes with a built-in flash and two shutters for portrait or landscape pics. Delivery in two days from ***www.camerabynet.com***.

TOP BUY

RETRO GAMES ARCADE £2995

Revisit your mis-spent youth thanks to ***www.digitaltables.co.uk***. Here you can buy a retro arcade table of your own custom design, fitted with a 3.1GHz, 60Gb computer – enough to hold thousands of classic arcade games downloadable from the Net. The ultimate rich gamer's plaything.

SIMPLE GUIDELINES FOR PAINLESS ONLINE PURCHASING

HOW TO SHOP SAFELY ONLINE>>

CHECK THAT THE SITE IS SECURE

A small padlock will appear in the bottom left of your browser to show that you can safely send credit card details through the site. Your Web browser will also tell you whether a site is secure or not when you enter it.

SHOP WITH BRAND-NAME COMPANIES

As with shopping in the real world, you're better off with a company you've actually heard of – gather recommendations from other online shoppers and our Retail Therapy pages, or use a directory such as ***www.shopsmart.com***.

PRINT THE CONTRACT

This is the only permanent record of your purchase, so make sure you keep it, along with your order number, billing address and other details. You might also find it helpful to note down order numbers, and to print out screens as you go through the ordering process.

NEVER SEND ANYTHING BY EMAIL

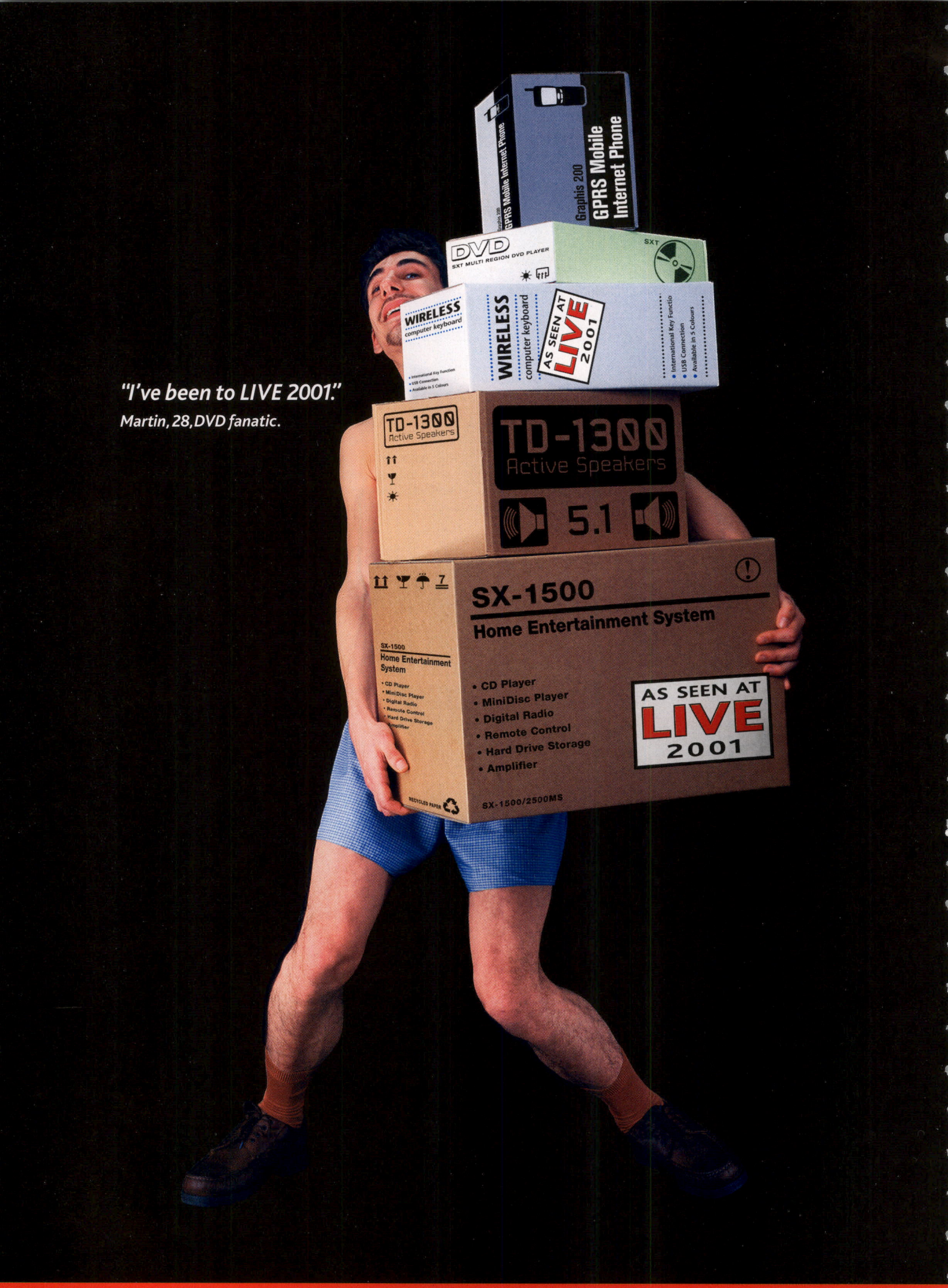
Don't send card details by email – it can be intercepted.

CHECK DELIVERY TIMES AND CHARGES

Companies should tell you the delivery charge, if there is one, on their site. If you're in the Highlands and Islands or Ireland, you may find free delivery doesn't apply.

IF IT GOES WRONG, DON'T WORRY

Your local Trading Standards office (***www.tradingstandards.gov.uk***) will help resolve any problems – but often an email or letter should clarify matters.



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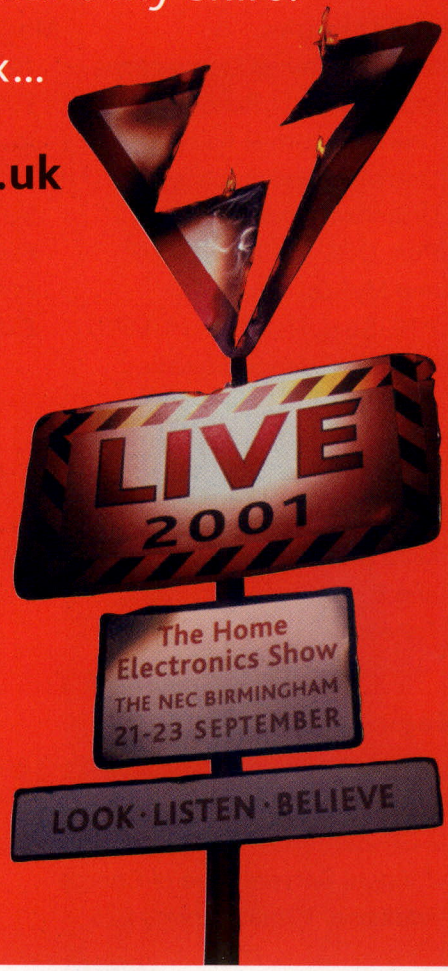

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Magic Business Only

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- 3GB Bandwidth per Month
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- Free Microsoft FrontPage Extensions

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Our state of the art data centres are located within our facilities in London and Nottingham. They house our network of over 1500 servers.

Virtual Control Panel 2001

The Virtual Control Panel 2001 allows you to automatically control your website without any knowledge of programming!

Magic Business E-commerce Only

- All the Features of the Magic Business
- Miva Merchant Easy and Fast to use Shopping Cart and E-commerce Solution
- Try our Demo Online

24/7 Technical Support

All Magic Moments hosting packages come complete with 24/7/365 phone and e-mail technical support.

Magic Reseller Only

- 2 GB Web Space and 2000 POP3 E-mail Boxes to Share Between Your Customers
- 3 GB Bandwidth Per Month per Domain
- 2 Virtual Servers Free of Charge
- Additional Virtual Servers £25

If you want to use the power of the internet to break down your own communication barriers, talk to Magic Moments. Whether you are planning a simple website or an e-commerce enabled on-line application, our friendly and knowledgeable sales team will provide a solution that is absolutely right for you. And that's not all. Our after sales service is second to none, solving any problems you may encounter.

Prices exclude VAT @ 17.5%

WHAT WEBSITE?

The Best of the Web

@ CHANNELS://

> MOVIES 58
Stay ahead of the pack with our pick of the online movie news services

> SPORT 62
The biggest names don't always have the best sites – we put them to the test

> MUSIC 64
Record collecting sites for the vinyl lover

> GAMES 66
Some of the best online games can be played for free if you know where to go

> MONEY 68
Insure your motor for less on the Net

> LEARNING 70
The kids are back at school, but homework help is at hand on the Web

> TRAVEL 74
You'll be amazed at the savings when you book your hotel online

> SOCIETY 76
What can the Government do for you? Putting e-Britain's services to the test

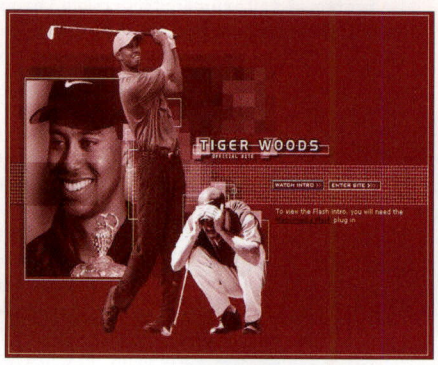
> THE DIRECTORY 84
Hundreds of the best sites on the Web, in a handy A-Z format

thenet GOLD AWARD

the net Gold Award is handed to those five-star sites we recognise as all-time essential URLs

PICTURE: PA

MOVIES Keep up to date with the Hollywood rumour mill with the Web's help



SPORT Big names, massive sites

TRAVEL Book a night away on the Net

FOCUS:// Movie news

Click for flicks news

Want to keep your finger on Hollywood's pulse? Forget Sunset Boulevard, hit the Internet...

Nicole was incredibly proud of her ponytail

AIN'T IT COOL

www.aintitcool.com ★★★★

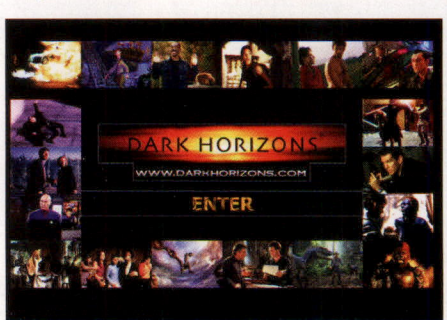
Ain't It Cool founder Harry Knowles has become one of the Internet's bona fide celebrities, with his Web site gradually gaining the kind of clout that can make or break a film (*Batman and Robin* being a famous casualty). Courtesy of an international army of spies, Ain't It Cool features the latest info, from the highly anticipated blockbusters like *Spider Man* to small indie efforts. Delivered with an enthusiastic and unashamedly 'geeky' style, you cannot deny the high calibre of scoops available here, with no high-security movie set safe from the prying eyes of Knowles and his ever-vigilant spies. It's not all roses, though: the tone is overtly fanboyish and articles often suffer from Knowles's inability to write anything under 3000 words or not mention intimate details of his life. Ain't It Cool showcases the power of the geek better than any other site.

@ If you have to bookmark one.../

DARK HORIZONS

www.darkhorizons.com ★★★★★

Based in Sydney, Dark Horizons ('It was just a name I thought up which sounded cool at the time') is clearly a labour of love for creator/editor Garth Franklin, who tirelessly and enthusiastically collates all the latest insider news for the legions of scoop-hungry film fans. Being the main competitor for Ain't It Cool, Dark Horizons dispenses with that site's sometimes overblown wide-eyed rhetoric and lets the calibre of the news speak for itself. Updated daily, the news and rumours section features short and sharp briefs on the latest on-set occurrences, script changes, on-set pictures, teaser posters and all manner of film-related happenings – and there's tons of it. Intermingled with the news are the latest trailers (Quicktime, varying file sizes), interviews and reviews of the latest releases, either from himself or regular contributors. Helpfully, Franklin caters for the big three territories for Hollywood and that includes the UK, so you won't be looking at irrelevant information. While his box office data is Australia and US only, it's a mine of information as he keeps records of the last three years. Sites like this are all too rare, but this remains the best of a small bunch. Quick, easy, reliable – invaluable.



Dark Horizons: a veritable mine of filmic information

EMPIRE ONLINE

www.empireonline.co.uk ★★★★

It's been a long time coming, but the UK's largest and most respected film magazine finally has an online presence that does it proud. While the bulk of the content is lifted from the magazine, the site features its own regularly updated news section that will keep you fully informed of the latest occurrences. While not offering a huge amount of coverage (four to five items daily), what's there is entertaining and eclectic – from exclusive *Star Wars* pictures to John Travolta being offered $20m for his sperm. It also has regular exclusive interviews. Like many sites, Empire has been quick to recognise the attraction of email news, delivering a flashy HTML weekly edition covering the major stories, UK/US Box Office results and preview news.

YAHOO! MOVIES

movies.yahoo.com ★★★★

Yahoo! has developed into one of the most formidable online presences and has effectively used its mammoth information resource to

WORDS: DANNY GRAYDON; PICTURES: PA

Yahoo! Movies: reliable as ever

provide unparalleled and trustworthy news coverage. So, if you want to have your movie news derived from reliable sources, you'll be getting it from the esteemed likes of Hollywood bible *Variety* and Reuters. There are always a dozen (constantly updated) stories available with a special full coverage section for breaking or continuing news. If you want to go straight to the source, Yahoo! provides links to all its news partners and gives you a good breakdown of recent box office grosses. Despite the plain presentation and lack of imagery, the coverage and calibre of information is faultless.

ZAP2IT.COM

www.zap2it.com/movies ★★★★

Zap2It.com recently received significant acclaim for its excellent coverage of the fan re-edit of *The Phantom Menace*, but it was far from a one-off scoop. This is a great port of call if you want to have the full run-down on the US movie scene: a dedicated entertainment news service, the site runs up to 10 news items a day. However, if you have an interest in the seamier side, the site features a tabloid report, so you won't miss out on the likes of Bruce Willis' alleged X-rated video antics. Additionally, there is a comprehensive casting section, and detailed analysis of current box office figures. Despite limited coverage of the UK industry, this is both a perfect research tool and a top-notch news resource.

ZENTERTAINMENT

www.zentertainment.com

★★★★★

If you want your news concise, quickly consumed and convenient, then this excellent entertainment news service was made just for you. Though it covers the whole gamut of entertainment, Zen's film coverage is superb, laid out like a newswire service and complemented with links to the source, so you have the choice to follow up your interest rather than wade through pages of text. Want to see the latest trailers? Links to teasers and full trailers are in abundance, in various formats. The email edition is undoubtedly one the film buff should sign up for, as the sheer volume and quality of »

LINKS ;-) THE ABC OF *AI*

Stanley's Web of intrigue

As you read this, thousands of people are on the trail of a murderer. Banding their intelligence together, they are scouring the Internet for clues, from cunning wordplay to Web site source code, trying to avenge Evan Chan, who died 141 years from now. The largest mysteries often begin with the smallest details, and this one began with two questions: Who is Jeanine Salla and what, exactly, is a 'Sentient Machine Therapist'?

Confused? Ms Salla's strange credit innocuously appeared on the credits of the Internet-only trailer for the much-anticipated Spielberg/Kubrick sci-fi film *AI: Artificial Intelligence* (see ***www.aimovie.com***). While many were blinded by the overtly saccharine tone of the trailer ('His love is real. He is not'), a few enterprising fans had their curiosity piqued by Ms Salla's understated contribution – and got to work on the Web.

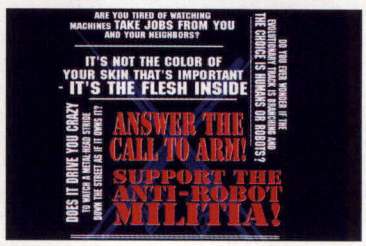
Collective intelligence is pooled as a 'hive mind'

A name search on Google.com revealed a site, ***www.jeaninesalla.com***, detailing AI research – two centuries hence. What had been stumbled upon was an intensely complex, brilliantly innovative promotional campaign that is so immersed in its detailed fiction, the film isn't even mentioned. From Salla's site were links to further sites, such as The Coalition for Robot Freedom (***www.inourimage.org***), the Sentient Property Crime Bureau (***www.spcb.org***), the Anti-Robot Militia (***www.unite-and-resist.org***) and the non-existent Bangalore University (***bangaloreworldu-in.co.nz***). The suspicious death of one Evan Chan (***www.familychan.org***) is frequently mentioned. Brief Flash animations warn amateur sleuths off the trail. So far, so odd.

Ranging from personal home pages to research papers to corporate sites, they are professionally laid out, detailing the world of 2142, where artificial intelligence is central to daily life. With links to even more sites, this strange, tantalising new world unfolds and, if you want to find out who murdered Evan, you'll have to look at them all.

With such a superbly teasing hook, the online response has been enormous, prompting a Net-assisted buzz for a film that hasn't been seen since *The Blair Witch Project*'s reality-blurring Web site. Ain't It Cool (***www.aintitcool.com***), which first broke the story, received over 22,000 messages in the two months following the trailer's April release.

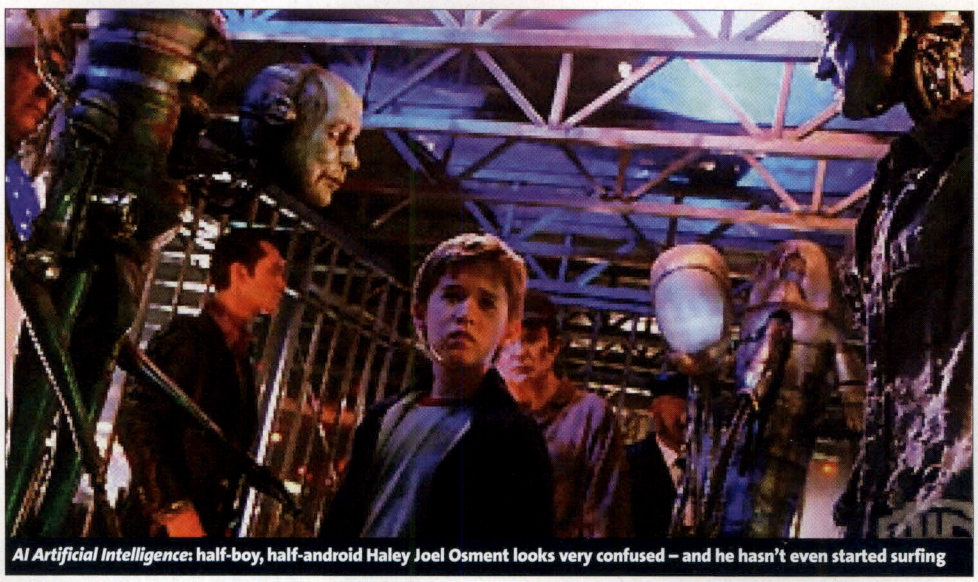
The investigative centrifuge is at The Cloudmakers (***www.cloudmakers.org***), where more than 6,000 people have joined the cause. The sheer scale of the endeavour clearly requires communities to solve it and Net audiences have responded enthusiastically, revelling in the chance to pool collective intelligence as a 'hive mind'. 'This game is being played interactively, based on Cloudmaker hive mind response time, with modifications to the puzzles being made in real time,' commented one Cloudmaker.



Those puzzles are by no means easy, requiring technical savvy alongside deductive prowess. Cryptic clues are hidden within images that can only be found by some nifty fiddling in Photoshop, and entire pages are encrypted in the HTML source-code of another page that can only be viewed through clever coding.

While the concept is clearly a work of marketing genius, the genesis of it remains unclear. The studios are tight-lipped and rumours persist that Kubrick himself concocted detailed guidelines on promotion.

While film fans are becoming increasingly jaded by the endless stream of uninspired and bland promo sites, the *AI* network has been an astoundingly well thought-out creative venture and wake-up call to studios and fans alike. Shame someone had to die for it.


AI Artificial Intelligence: half-boy, half-android Haley Joel Osment looks very confused – and he hasn't even started surfing

FOCUS:// Movie news <cont>

(multimedia) news collected in one convenient place will save you valuable surfing time. Unmissable and indispensable.

GUARDIAN FILM

film.guardian.co.uk ★★★★★

The Guardian's acclaimed arts coverage in print has been well reflected online in Guardian Film, a serious site for serious fans. The site's news coverage is as you'd expect: just the facts and presented in a clear, professional style. Reflecting the professional journalistic output, the tone is far from the gossipy, excitable prrose favoured by other sites, and Guardian Film will undoubtedly cover areas of cinema more widespread than the Hollywood machine (Stephen King is to adapt Lars von Trier's *The Kingdom*, for instance). The site also features a packed archive of trailers, which when we dropped by had been updated with all the forthcoming US content (*America's Sweethearts*, *Spider Man*) – available in multiple formats. All the info you need and none of the puff you don't.

The site reflects its professional journalistic output

HOLLYWOOD.COM

www.hollywood.com ★★★

Like Zentertainment, this covers the entertainment spectrum of Hollywood (celebs, TV, music, video), but the accent, of course, is on the silver screen, with a professional and varied look at the events in film, more aimed at the industrial side (Screen Actors Guild, box office analysis, for example). With so many sites devoted to tittle-tattle or exposing the top-secret elements of the latest blockbuster, it's refreshing to see a site with adept coverage of such issues. The box office analyses are a key attraction here, making for intriguing and informative reading. With a simple layout and the stories broken down into month-long archives, the news items are small and concise, but unfortunately have no links to further details.

MOVIES.COM

movies.go.com

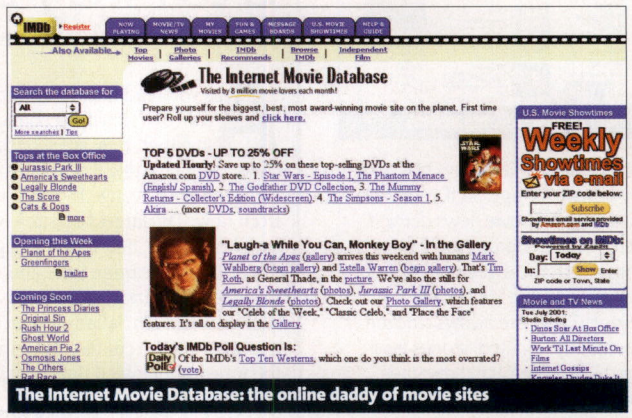
★★★★

Those who enjoy their movie news with a dash of tangy gossip will like Movies.com, pilfering its news content from sister site, Mr.Showbiz. Though certainly not trashy, it's a breezy read and always covers all the bases, with a pleasing mixture of blockbusters ('Burton Finishes *Apes*, Ending Leaked'), celebrities ('Kidman says Cruise Denied Affair') and box office ('Jurassic Park Roars to No.1'). Alongside all the usual box office numbers is a detailed listing of all the upcoming attractions, replete with technical details, trivia factoids, and trailers for forthcoming releases through to early next year. Attractive, easy and enjoyable, some might want 'harder' news, but it's certainly got the 'show' for showbusiness.

Guardian Film: all the information you want with none of the puff you don't

@CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials



The Internet Movie Database: the online daddy of movie sites

MOVIE REVIEWS

The Internet Movie Database (IMDb)
uk.imdb.com
The bible of online film – use the search engine or be lost.

Movie Review Query Engine
www.mrqe.com
Check the received wisdom on more than 19,000 films.

The Trailer Park
www.movie-trailers.com
Trailers for all the newest films.

CINEMA LISTINGS AND DIRECTORIES

UCI Cinemas
www.cineworld.co.uk
Find out what's playing, as well as what's on sale in the kiosk here.

Virgin Net – Movies
www.virgin.net/movies
Takes the hassle out of organising a trip to the cinema.

Cineworld – Multiplex Cinema
www.cineworld.co.uk
UK film portal that also includes a cinema finder.

OFFICIAL FILM RESOURCES

Fox Movies
www.foxmovies.com
Provides links to all 20th Century Fox releases.

Miramax Café
www.miramax.com
Links to all Miramax releases, plus general movie news.

Warner Bros Online
www.movies.warnerbros.com
Site featuring WB's new films and lost classics.

ONLINE SHORTS

Atom Films
www.atomfilms.com
Shockwave-only shorts from the creators of the *Angry Kid* series.

Film Force: showcases new flicks

Britshorts
www.britshorts.com
Vast collection of British and European mini-films.

SCIENCE FICTION

IGN Film Force
www.filmforce.ign.com
A mine of excellent micro-sites delivering professional and informative news and interviews.

Assignment X
www.assignmentx.com
The online home of US mag *Cinescape* offers up-to-the minutes news and links to fan sites.

KIDS' FILMS

Film Values
www.filmvalues.com
The ultimate parents' guide.

Movie Mom
www.moviemom.com
Check this site for films' recommended viewing ages if you're worried about corrupting the kids.

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Entertainment addresses The Directory p84

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- Service Level Agreement
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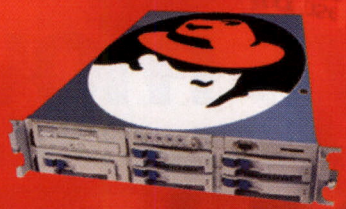
Are you outgrowing virtual hosting? Running into extra costs for high bandwidth use, more domains and email? Does the server itself seem slow and inflexible? Does your web designer keep saying there are so many things you could be doing if only you had more speed and space, and access to the 'workings' of the server? Your accountant won't let you spend a fortune on leased lines and computers. Maybe you don't have the technical staff to run your own network anyway. Well, you have no choice but to put up with virtual hosting, right?

Wrong. The serious solution to web hosting is a dedicated server, and it's within your reach now. You can benefit from high value Service Level Agreements just like the biggest players in your industry. You can enjoy the speed and flexibility of your own server in one of the country's leading Data Centres. You can even choose a server that's as technically simple to operate as virtual hosting, but without the restrictions. Your web designer will be happy.

So will your accountant, because dedicated servers cost less than you think. In fact, they can even work out cheaper than your existing virtual hosting arrangements. You get all the flexibility, all the control, all the speed and room for growth, and all at NO CAPITAL COST. Interested? Call us now.

Additional services such as co-location, system monitoring, firewalls, security services, system backups, managed system administration also available, contact us for details.

LINUX SERVERS



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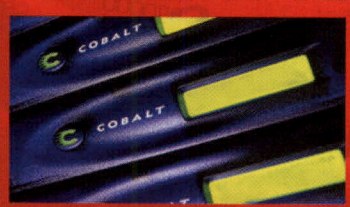
COBALT RAQ SERVERS



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FOCUS:// Sports stars' own sites

Straight from the jockey's mouth

Which top sports stars make the biggest effort with their Internet presence?

Dennis Bergkamp: one of many Icons

@ If you have to bookmark one...

ICONS

www.icons.com ★★★★★

Icons hosts micro-sites for a host of international football stars, of whom Dennis Bergkamp has the most visited site. It's easy to see why. What Icons does may be as formulaic an approach to the Web as All Bar One is to the pub, but like those boozers it gives you what you want without any frills or fuss. Bergkamp's site opens with a cheesy grinning picture of the Dutch Destroyer and a letter penned by Den (in which he proudly tells us he's had a site here since May 2000). There are all the usuals, such as latest news, a diary, competitions, autobiography, views on teammates, audio clips, Dennis's Fantasy XI, a photo gallery, a chance to contact the man, and off-the-pitch news in which we learn that – surprise surprise – Bergy is a keen golfer. However, he does reveal that his wife plays golf too, and that he enjoys reading; the last novel he read was about a woman fiddling the lottery. Despite Bergkamp's rather anodyne tone, Icons is often the first place a disenchanted player will mouth off, and it's these larger revelations that have made the site popular with the tabloids. As a result, users have to log on to the site in a bid to stop quotes being used (don't ask us how), which is a pain in the arsenal.

Icons.com: treasure trove of gossip, for the fan and the tabloid hack

JENSON BUTTON

www.jensonbutton.com ★★★★

First up, this site looks excellent – it's fast and modern and so just right for an up and coming young Formula One star such as Jenson Button. Often, though, with sites that look flash, they're as difficult to handle as an F1 car; however, you should be able to steer this one as swiftly and easily as our Jenson zips round a racetrack. It's got pictures, race descriptions, latest news about the world of F1, a detailed profile and biography as well as Jenson's career history, and loads of facts and statistics. You could end up knowing more about him than he knows about himself. In addition, there's a wider F1 guide with track layouts, a chat room, a fan club, an online shop, and a complete multimedia section which includes video clips, a picture gallery, screensaver, games and competitions.

GEORGE BEST OFFICAL

www.georgebestofficial.com ★★★★

There's loads about 'Georgie Best superstar' online, and this is easily the best of the bunch. It looks as good as Best did when he was mesmerising defenders and ladies alike in the late Sixties, and features Best's football opinions (he's clearly still a huge fan), news about the former Manchester United and Northern Ireland star, a complete biography, an online shop, games, pictures and videos. In fact, the one thing that stops the site being awarded five stars is that the video clips are from chat shows. Sure, his drunken ramblings were funny at the time, but what the man was best at was football: anyone can get drunk, but not everyone can be a footballing genius. Oh, and don't miss his wife Alex's section – for some reason, which we like, she offers a 'souper soup' recipe.

THE ANDRE AGASSI SITE

www.andresite.com ★★★

Surely, what the majority of fans really appreciate about their sporting heroes is their athletic skills. Sadly, too many sports stars' sites forget this. This site, however, doesn't, and there's some regularly updated tennis action in which Agassi thrills us – check out the photo gallery, audio, and video clips. That said, this is is not a pretty site, especially for a pretty tennis superstar. It's just too dark – as though Agassi was in a Goth death metal band. It redeems itself with its detail, especially in the news and statistic sections – in 1999, Agassi won a handsome $4million playing the game he loves while travelling the globe. Oh well, it's a dirty job but someone's gotta do it ...

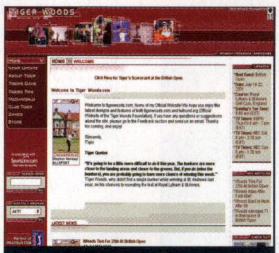
WORDS: DAVID HURST; PICTURES: PA

JONNY WILKINSON
www.jonny-wilkinson.co.uk
★★★★
Here's Jonny! And his site is as refreshingly simple and clean as a rugger boy before the game begins. It gives you clear and concise information about the man and his rugby. It lists Wilkinson's honours, personal details (he's 5ft 10in and 14st of muscle, in case you were wondering), how his training is going, as well as his views on all the latest rugby news. A big plus is that it's very personable, as though Wilkinson has written just for you, and there is a chance to email the England fly-half. Also on the site is a regularly updated interview with the star. And when you've had enough of news and scores (from both rugby codes), competitions, audio, live chat and message board, there are plenty of options to get out with links to other players' sites.

TIGER WOODS
www.tigerwoods.com
★★★★
This site looks grrrr-eat and is full of fine golfing detail without being too clogged up – in fact, it's as easy as walking round a golf course with someone carrying your bags. As you'd expect from Woods' official Web site, there are plenty of reports and details of upcoming golfing events. But there's loads more. In fact it's packed, with news about how he plays his game, video, audio and action (if there is such a thing in golf) pictures. Also worth checking out is Club Tiger, which has live chats, emails, Tiger's tales, games and and an online store. Finally, there's also the latest quotes from the man, like 'It's going to be a little more difficult to do it this year'. But hasn't golfing's finest been saying that for years now?

DENISE LEWIS
www.btinternet.com/~m.holland/
★★★
Everything is present and correct on this site dedicated to top British athlete Denise Lewis as you'd expect from a sports star's site, from the latest news to details on her career as well as action (and other) photos. There's also a lively and friendly letter from Lewis, helpful explanations of the events she competes in, and some very useful links. However, its real strong point and why it's an example to other sites is its endless search for the latest media coverage of Lewis: everything from *Reader's Digest* to *The Observer* seems to have been searched, found and downloaded. It's completed with due care and attention, but it looks as bland and bald as Duncan Goodhew's head. It's just not very 'sexy'. Strange, given the subject matter...

LENNOX LEWIS
www.lennox-lewis.com ★★★★
We like this site, not least because the boxer punches a bit of fun into it. There's all the stuff you'd hope for on a site dedicated to a sporting hero: a biography, his interests and hobbies, ringside news, a fans' corner and an online shop (including, predictably, a sports collection, but also, unpredictably, Lennox's underpants collection. It looks naff too, but we wouldn't say it to his face...). In addition, there's the latest press, how to contact Lewis, useful links and statistics. There's also decent video footage of the man in awesome action. Finally, check out the Little-Known Facts section. You'd never guess the big man likes to relax by playing chess and loves eating Wheaties for his brekkie. You could guess, though, that his favourite film is *Scarface*...


Tiger Woods: gets his rounds in

Get your hands on Lennox's underpants collection

MICHAEL JORDAN
jordan.sportsline.com ★★★★
Considering the US basketball giant has a personal wealth which makes Posh and Becks look like Steptoe and Son, you'd probably expect Michael Jordan to dip into his vast pockets to provide an online presence. He certainly has – this official site isn't flawless, but it gives a pretty good idea to other sporting celebs of what they should be striving for. While news is thin on the ground, Jordan keeps fans up to date by answering their questions on a regular basis, alongside comprehensive career info and stats, audio and video clips and a chat room. Also worth noting is the superb collection of Shockwave games in which you can take on the star in slam-dunking or dribbling. One word of caution: if you've never been exposed to Jordan's spin-off musical 'efforts', avoid the OffCourt section like the plague. Don't say you weren't warned.

@CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials

Sky Sports: one of the best for sport news, and you don't even have to subscribe

LATEST NEWS AND SCORES
ESPN.com
espn.go.com
Scores for all sports, with a distinctly American bias.
Sky Sports
www.skysports.com
Hot sports news from Sky that comes free of charge.
Soccernet
www.soccernet.com
Score flashes from all UK games (part of the ESPN network).
Sporting Life
www.sporting-life.com
News, scores and betting advice on everything from football to the NFL.

TOP FOOTBALL SITES
Football365.com
www.football365.com
Humour, news and plenty of features.
Teamtalk
www.teamtalk.com
Independent club news service.
Rivals.net
football.rivals.net
For the fans, by the fans: a network of team fan sites from the man-on-the-terrace perspective.
One Football
www.onefootball.com
The whole of Europe covered.

SITES FOR INDIVIDUAL SPORTS
Cricinfo
www.cricinfo.com
The bible of online cricket: scores updated live as they happen, news from around the globe plus a massive stats database.
ITV-F1
www.itv-f1.com
News, articles and chat from the world of Formula One.

Atlas F1: maps out motor racing

FOLLOW EVENTS LIVE
PlanetFootball.com
www.planetfootball.com
Hub site for English football clubs' audio broadcasts.
Sport On Air
www.sportonair.com
Up-to-date streamed broadcasts, covering football to cricket.
talkSPORT
www.talksport.net
Listen to the radio station's sports coverage as it happens.

ONLINE BETTING SITES
Sporting Index
www.sportingindex.com
The biggest spread-betting site.
Victor Chandler
www.victorchandler.com
User-friendly site from the traditional bookie.

NEWSGROUP
rec.sport.football.misc
A place to enjoy a verbal kick-about with other football fans.

MAILING LIST
Receive a daily newsletter of sporting news and insight by subscribing to ***DailySportsFan.com-subscribe@topica.com***.

CHAT
www.4-lane.com/sportschat
A host of sports chat rooms, from the Olympics to scuba diving.

NEED MORE? Useful sports addresses The Directory p84

FOCUS:// Record collecting

'Got any Chesney Hawkes, mate?'

Use the Net to track down those tricky discs and never be embarrassed again

Try as he might, John couldn't find his *Nelly the Elephant* 12"

NETSOUNDS

www.netsounds.com ★★★★★

Netsounds (nice Beach Boys pun there) is one of a large band of sites which don't sell anything, but catalogue it all. In a rather neat analogy, Netsounds describes itself as 'an online shopping centre which is full of record shops. Netsounds owns the shopping centre and the sellers offer their product from their space within the shopping centre'. Lovely. But enough of the soft sell, what about the music? Well, we had a good return for the searches we did – Oasis yielded a staggering 2,500 items and even a search for rising Welsh indie band Murry the Hump (***www.murrythehump.co.uk***) yielded practically their whole back catalogue of 17 items. Although NetSounds is little more than a search engine, it's the best in the business at finding what you want and links you straight through to shopping outlets – where EIL.com is the equivalent of Yahoo! with lots of added features, NetSounds is on a par with Google.

GEMM.COM

www.gemm.com ★★★★★

The front page of the Global Electronic Music Marketplace says it all: the world's largest music 'catalog' with 11 million items from 4,000 sellers. Yes, it's American but it's certainly one of the best chances you have to get your claws on a mint 7" copy of Tiffany's *I Think We're Alone Now*.

While the site is basically another directory, it's a very, very good one as the product details are always thorough – one criticism of other 'directory' sites is that they don't provide enough information. The trouble is that with the multitude of formats and international versions of even one release, it's quite easy to choose the wrong thing. One foolproof way around this is to find the catalogue number and search by that. It should be fairly easy to get hold of, either from the artist's site or a discography.

RECORD COLLECTING.COM

www.recordcollecting.com ★★★

While it's a difficult portal to get used to, this is a superb database of sites and forums. The site is American in origin and there are hideous pop-up ads which appear every five seconds, but it's a good resource for both wannabe collectors and established ones – you'll find links to huge numbers of resellers plus FAQs and information about buying records online. The best feature of the site is the classified section. Private collectors and sellers can search for, or place an ad about, records, CDs or other music collectables.

RECORD COLLECTOR SALE

www.rcsetsale.com ★★★★

The *Record Collector* magazine site at ***www.recordcollectormag.com*** is surprisingly devoid of any useful features. Instead, you have to dig a little deeper to find this catalogue created by the people behind the magazine. Unfortunately there's no online version of the Rare Record Price Guide, but there's a diary for forthcoming record fairs and an extremely useful 'ready reckoner' so if you know how much a mint condition copy of *Mistletoe and Wine* is worth, then you can work out how much your 'good' condition copy is worth (not an awful lot, one

@ If you have to bookmark one...

EIL.COM

eil.com ★★★★★

At first glance EIL.com looks more like it was designed to sell the you the new Travis album for £9.99 than somewhere to dig out an old Englebert Humperdinck 45. But as we all know, appearances can be deceptive; delve deeper and you'll find some cracking rarities. Like many of the other sites we've featured in this record collecting round-up, it's basically a catalogue derived from an amalgam of different sources and sellers. Although at 250,000 LPs, CDs and singles the catalogue isn't as in-depth as some, it wins out because it's British, and what's more is extremely well designed. Generally, the design of sites selling musical obscurities is extremely poor but EIL is the exception; it navigates well, looks nice and the shopping cart is effective.

EIL: looks great and does the business, too

The site is also affiliated to the Which? Webtrader Code of Practice (***whichwebtrader.which.net***), giving you much-needed peace of mind as you hunt for rarities. The site is also available in French, German and Japanese and all the prices are given in pounds sterling as well as in dollars. It might not find everything you've ever wanted, but certainly for beginners upwards it makes a great starting point. If used in conjunction with ***www.engelbert.com***, of course.

WORDS: DAN GRABHAM; PICTURES: KOBAL

suspects). In an attempt to standardise second hand record sales the magazine has issued a set of standards for record condition and these are usefully detailed on the site. All in all, it's a handy, if not essential, tool for the second-hand seller. There's a personal classified ads area, too, although when we visited it was advertising a 'unique Phil Collins memorabilia package' including a 'letter of thanks from Jimmy Saville.' The gems you find on the Net, eh?

HARD TO FIND RECORDS

www.htfr.com

★★★★

HTFR predominantly concerns itself with finding rare dance vinyl so if you've been looking for a rare dance release or mix then you've found heaven. You can browse the 55,000-strong catalogue by genre, or search by artist. For a site which grew out of a single shop in Birmingham, it's remarkably well-developed. HTFR also deals in DJ equipment and as well as the diversity of stock, the site is in our list because it's quite rare to find a site this good from an individual record shop. The site offers order tracking and postage rates aren't too bad. It was also one of the best sites we came across in terms of how all the info is set out – it's clear how much you'll be paying and what your rights are if you need to send your purchase back.

Many Web shoppers get stung by postage on box sets

VINYLSEARCHER

www.vinylsearcher.com ★★★

With over 148,000 records on its books, VinylSearcher is one of the biggest vinyl-specific search engines on the Net. Again, the site specialises in dance records: you can browse by artist or genre and the site is a catalogue of vinyl from a myriad of different sellers. It's easy to navigate – even if the scrolling menus do get a little annoying – and you can contribute by sending in links to vinyl sellers on the Web or by getting listed on the site yourself. There's also a useful email newsletter you can subscribe to, plus streaming audio and video.

Hard To Find: but very easy to use

DUSTYGROOVE

www.dustygroove.com ★★★★

Dusty Groove is based in Chicago and deals in CDs as well as the black stuff. You can browse by format within a genre – the store predominantly deals with soul, funk, jazz and hip-hop releases. There's an innovative 'take-out' window, too. Order over the Net and you can ask them to get the items ready for you: simply turn up, pay and take your records away. Sadly for Brits the plane fare may cost a bit more than any savings made online, but it's a nice idea, anyway. Dusty Groove also has a good information section so you know exactly how much postage you'll have to pay – many online shoppers get stung because of postage costs, especially on heavy vinyl box sets.

DISQUE

www.disque.co.uk ★★★★

Disque is a London-based record store selling both CDs and vinyl. The site shows the current Disque Top 50 as well as a page of 'must-have' recent releases. Both recent and back-catalogue items are sold.

The site also has a mailing list which is customisable – tell the staff what or who you want to know information on and they'll tell you any new news or releases they get. Disque also has a pop-up jukebox window with a variety of songs you can listen to with RealPlayer.

MORE MUSIC

www.moremusic.co.uk ★★★

Although this site isn't the best design-wise, there's a lot of good rarities to be gleaned from its pages. Items are categorised by genre and then format or period. MoreMusic is a shop based in Swansea, and its site specialises in obscure and hard-to-find UK alternative music. Never before had we seen so many EMF 12"s. The database has a notes section, but be careful to ensure you know exactly what release you want or have a catalogue number to hand, as if you're looking for an unusual song or mix it might well be that you're looking at a different version of the same release.

@ CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials

BAND SITES

UBL.com
ubl.artistdirect.com
Should be your first port of call to use the huge search engine.

Bigmouth
www.bigmouth.co.uk
UK-specific site with many a link.

NEWS AND REVIEWS

NME.com
www.nme.com
NME's online version, with a reputation for breaking news.

Rolling Stone
www.rollingstone.com
The US magazine has pulled out all the stops online.

MTV
www.mtv.com
Exclusive news plus free downloads.

DOWNLOADS

Emusic.com
www.emusic.com
'The premier source for legitimate MP3s'.

MP3.com
www.mp3.com
The site which started it all, still thriving on unsigned bands.

Garageband
www.garageband.com
Top-quality artists screened by discerning judges.

GIGS AND TOURS

Aloud.com
www.aloud.com
Top search engine for every kind of UK gig, from classical to rock.

firstcalltickets.com
www.firstcalltickets.com
Tickets for just about everything, from gigs to flower shows.

Ticketmaster
www.ticketmaster.co.uk
The best ticket service around.

ONLINE GIGS

VirtueTV
www.virtuetv.com/music/concerts
Top artists plus interviews and a huge range of non-music content.

Hob.com
www.hob.com/onlinemusic/webcasts
Includes an impressive archive.

Hob.com: a great source of live music

BUYING CHART CDS

Secondsounds
secondsounds.com
Cheap second-hand CDs.

Audiostreet
www.audiostreet.co.uk
Cheap prices and free postage.

Play247
www.play247.com
Reliable service and a wide range.

NEWSGROUP

rec.music.collecting.vinyl
Exchange records and advice on caring from them with other vinyl collectors.

CHAT ROOM

Find a room for your favourite pop genre at ***imusic2.artistdirect.com***.

MTV.com: everything you'd expect from the musical maestros

NEED MORE?
Latest music sites What's New p16
Useful music addresses The Directory p84

FOCUS:// Free Web-based games

While the cat's away...

Presenting the best ways to waste five minutes on the Net while the boss has nipped out of the office

NETBABYWORLD

www.netbabyworld.com ★★★★

Netbaby's large white head may have little in the way of expressive features (enigmatic smile aside) but the same can't be said of his collection of games. The dozen on display here are an eclectic range designed to reflect the hobbies and jobs of Netbaby (aka Digger) and his chums – so there's tennis, tenpin and high-jump but also challenges based in a post office and a music shop. The feel is very retro in a Commodore 64 style with chunky graphics and an 80s arcade feel, but it's none the poorer for that. You can download the Playcom installer for 3D games, but if you only have a moment, Netbaby still has plenty to offer.

EZONE

www.ezone.com ★★★★★

Dozens and dozens of games in a scrolldown menu: now that's what we like in a site designed to give you relaxation during the odd five-minute skive from work (or indeed more serious surfing in your own leisure time). Moving your mouse over the front page excites a little character called Lenny Loosejocks, of whom you'll be seeing a lot: more than half the games feature this loveable loser in various adventures from the Outback to Pluto. There are card games, puzzles and first-person adventures along with arcade games (our favourites being *Cannonball Tennis* and *Santa Goes Buttboarding 3D*). Handily, Ezone gives you games to play while loading – mostly *Tetris* and *Breakout* clones, but they pass the ticking seconds nicely. Which is, after all, the point of a timewasting game...

CLEVERMEDIA

www.clevermedia.com/arcade

★★★★★

Air hockey! A seaside favourite is seamlessly transferred to the Net in dangerously addictive style, and there's no chance of banging your fingers (unless you get too excited with the mouse and career into the keyboard). But it's not all hockey: other sports games include a near-impossible darts sim (try it, we guarantee you've got no chance). There's also snowboarding, rallying and even golf if you fancy a stroll round the links. Then there's pinball, card games and lots of updates of some of the world's oldest board and logic games. Amateur coders and lovers of the postmodern may also be attracted to the 'Make-Your-Own-Game' game section.

BILBANA

www.tv4.se/lattjo/kojan/bilbanan.asp ★★★★★

Now that's not the easiest URL (if you forget it, look up Bilbana on Google). And there's only one game when you get there. And it can take a while to set it up. But trust us, it's worth it. Well, it is if you used to like Scalextric racing as a kid, or you fancy it now. Fire up the URL, ignore the pop-up window advertising Swedish TV (not a tempting diversion, admittedly) and choose 1- or 2-player game. Two players can play with mouse or keyboard, one player plays against a parrot (well, why not?) whose skill level can be raised from one to five by changing the 'Nivå' number over its head. Then build your track, which can include crossovers and chicanes; the site remembers the layout for your next visit, but you can change it at any

@ If you have to bookmark one... thenet GOLD AWARD

SHOCKWAVE

www.shockwave.com ★★★★★

It's perhaps entirely reasonable, maybe even predictable, that the creators of the Shockwave phenomenon should play host to the finest selection of five-minute timewasters on the World Wide Web, but the lengths to which Shockwave has gone to spice up your day for free would surprise even the most ardently workshy fop. There are hosts of them, neatly categorised into casino, puzzle, arcade and action game sections. Each has up to three dozen games within: for instance, check the sports section for golf, mini-golf, pool, tenpin, baseball, basketball, American football... all the games are eminently playable (the 3D pool, in particular, is the best we've seen anywhere on the Web) and visitors really could lose days in here. We also love the arcade section's 80s classics, such as *Spy Hunter*, *Rampage* and *Tank Wars*. There's even an exclusives section called 'Only on Shockwave' featuring new games you won't find anywhere else – which doesn't mean they're no good: Shockwave has begun to spread its creative wings by signing deals with animators like Atom Films, whose *Angry Kid* shorts can be seen through the site. And more committed gamers (or those not worried about the sack) can download the Shockmachine, a desktop application with plenty more games for you to play...

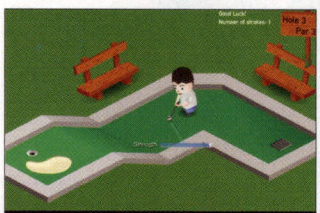
WORDS: GARY PARKINSON

time. Then you're off back to your youth, racing tiny cars. Turn the volume up (if the boss isn't in) and you even get the sound effects. Brilliant, evocative, fun and free – everything that's good about the Internet.

ELECTROTANK

www.electrotank.com ★★★★

Electrotank nearly caused this magazine to disappear last month: we spent so long playing *Mini Golf* at this superb new site, we almost forgot to put the mag together. Taking the cute little Charlie Brown round-headed kids through a challenging 18-hole course, competing with each other for the lowest score... it's like the real world, except it never rains. *Mini Golf* can be played against others online in real time or around the PC against mates. Electrotank will get that fifth star when more games come – at the moment, there's just golf and a 9-ball pool game – but if they're as engrossing and exhaustive as *MG*, there might be no mag to put the review in...



Electrotank: that's a badly aimed shot

ORISINAL.COM

www.ferryhalim.com/cowgame

★★★★★

There are 20 games at Orisinal, most of them fun, many of them excellent, but none quite tops *Milk the Cow*. Simple premise: click on cows to milk them, quick as poss, and don't worry about EU quotas. The only query we have is why you appear to be zooming above the field in a zig-zagging helicopter at 90mph, but at least it makes it fun. Elsewhere on Orisinal you can be a child on a beach smacking crabs on the bonce with a yo-yo, catch bees in bubbles or freeze penguins. Not recommended by the RSPCA, then, but these original and colourful games are certainly given the seal of approval by *the net*.

SHEEP GAME

www.sheepgame.co.uk ★★★★

Not the most imaginative name, but perhaps the makers got lost in rhetoric trying to render *One Man And His Dog* into a politically correct, non-gender specific title. Whatever, this is a superb game based on sheepherding. Revelling in the kind of colourful cuteness that only a combination of Shockwave and sheep can bring, *Sheep Game* is addictive fun. Instructions? As the site says, 'It's simple. The sheep run away from your cursor. So use that to steer them.' Simple but often infuriatingly difficult, the basic game will have sheep all over the screen. Then there are the subtle variations also available here...

FLASH ARCADE

www.flasharcade.com ★★★★

Of all the tenpin bowling games out there on the Web – and there is a profundity – the Flash Arcade has the best of the lot: an attractive game with plenty of control on your spin (a definite plus on the lanes, as any bowler will tell you). But there's more to the Flash Arcade than bowling: more than 30 games of varying stripes, ranging from tile-game puzzles to *Flashteroids*. There's a nice Net touch in the puzzles section: you can play 'cable modem vs DSL' as the rival platforms compete in a traditional fill-in-the-blocks game by laying pipes. That said, being topical can backfire – the Florida Election Recount game is a bit passé now.

Sheep Game: simple, attractive, addictive, brightly coloured and still alive

@ CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials

Happy Puppy: you will be too when you play the array of free demos here

CHEATS AND TIPS

Gamefaqs
www.gamefaqs.com
An essential first stop for walk-through guides and FAQs.

Code Junkies
www.codejunkies.com
Constantly updated database of codes for cheat cartridges by Datel and its rivals.

Cheat Code Central
www.cheatcc.com
Enormous database of effective cheat codes for each game region.

Computer and Video Games
www.computerandvideogames.com
For gaming news plus loads of user-friendly tips and cheats.

Code Junkies: cheats never prosper

Acdownload.com
www.acdownload.com
Loads of great downloads.

BUY GAMES

Gamesstreet
www.gamesstreet.infront.co.uk
Excellent deals on a range of games.

Game
www.game-retail.co.uk
The shop of the High Street store.

Chips
www.chipsworld.co.uk
Probably the best selection of console games on the Web.

Gameplay
www.gameplay.com
Large selection of games, with free delivery.

Gameshops
www.gameshops.co.uk
Traditional and non-computer games.

DEMOS

Happy Puppy
www.happypuppy.com
New demos and shareware games.

3DFiles.com
www.3dfiles.com
Demos and shareware downloads.

GAMING NEWS

Games Domain
www.gamesdomain.co.uk
News and games-related features.

Game Daily
www.gamedaily.com
Get the latest news from this site via an HTML newsletter.

Daily Radar UK
www.dailyradar.co.uk
News updated every 15 minutes.

IGN.Com
www.ign.com
More news, reviews, features, interviews.

NEWSGROUP

alt.games.all.games.network
Post your queries, answers or just look out for news of new games.

MAILING LIST

Send an email to ***gn-subscribe@ topica.com*** for the latest news, reviews and updates of all types of game, from cards to computers.

CHAT ROOM

IGN.Com
www.ign.com
Live chat with other game players.

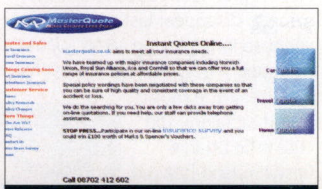
NEED MORE? Useful gaming addresses The Directory p84

FOCUS:// Car insurance

'That'll be £50, Mr Prost'

Protect yourself against prangs by weighing up several different car insurance quotes via the Internet

The reversing practice wasn't going too well



Masterquote: one of the best quotes

QUOTELINEDIRECT

www.quotelinedirect.co.uk ★★★

Every insurer wants to know what you do for a living, but most seem to have a list of occupations that was compiled at the time of Dickens – fine if you're a bank clerk, but big trouble if you work in e-commerce. All the more ironic, then, that Quotelinedirect offers Web designer as a sample occupation in its help section but can't actually get closer to finding it in the database than a 'commissioner of oaths'. This is immensely frustrating on an otherwise smartly designed site that offers to search a massive 450 insurers and delivered the goods with a hefty saving, though this was mitigated by the apparent lack of a no-claims protection option. Oddly, you can't make an online purchase, and the final screen which offers a telephone number omits displaying the rather vital quote number that was last seen two screens previously.

MASTERQUOTE

www.masterquote.co.uk ★★★★

There are many online insurance comparators in the UK, but it's worth remembering that some prominent online motoring names use a third-party provider – so two entirely different sites may be powered by exactly the same quote engine. So look carefully for the small print when you arrive at a site (take note of 'powered by' logos) and you may avoid needless repetition of effort. That said, it's surprising the differences that can arise in price and useability. Masterquote, for instance, powers the insurance service for car-buyers' bible *What Car?*; we did a like-for-like comparison test. Masterquote is a plain site that asks for everything but your shoe size, but it was worth the effort to battle through as the quote offered (selected from 10 providers) was one of the best.

WHAT CAR? QUICK QUOTE

https://www.bdmlonline.co.uk/whatcar ★★★

The eponymously badged insurance on the *What Car?* Quick Quote site is powered by Masterquote, so you might expect things to be exactly the same as on the latter's own site, but there are some differences worth noting. On the positive side, the help at *What Car?* is more comprehensive – especially at the mag's main site (***www.whatcar.com***). Clicking a help button on Masterquote's site is a minimalist experience, but the *What Car?* experts give you a lot more plain-English detail. There are also fewer questions to answer, or at least, the forms are better organised, which gives the same illusion, and that is half the battle. What you might not expect is a difference in quotes, but by taking this route we actually would have found ourselves £12 worse off than we were at Masterquote. Most surprising of all, although Masterquote allowed you previous accident claims, no such leniency was on offer from *What Car?*. So, better help, less odious forms, but apparently a lot less flexibility and a price to pay for it.

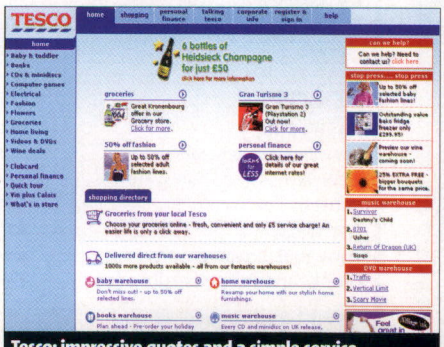
WORDS: JOHN GOSLING; PICTURE: KOBAL

@ If you have to bookmark one... thenet GOLD AWARD

TESCO

www.tesco.com ★★★★★

If there is one thing that puts a crimp in the otherwise sterling performance of the Tesco site, it's the size of the download required to access their quote engine. Don't believe for a moment their claim that it takes only a few seconds to arrive. The fact is, it's a bit of a beast, but definitely worth the wait. For starters – and surprisingly, given the long wait for something to happen – the form is brief in the extreme. You literally have a single screen of questions to answer, and you don't even need to give out an e-mail address at this stage, which provides a refreshing anonymity while you're still at the noncommittal, testing-the-water stage. The next page presents your quote and the opportunity to play around with the excess and experiment with various extras; if you're still not convinced and want to try elsewhere, just save the quote and return at any time to reactivate it. It's unlikely that you will need to stray, at least based on the enormous saving we secured. A slick and competitive offering as you'd expect from the likes of Tesco, and you can even earn Clubcard points while you're at it.



Tesco: impressive quotes and a simple service

DIRECT LINE

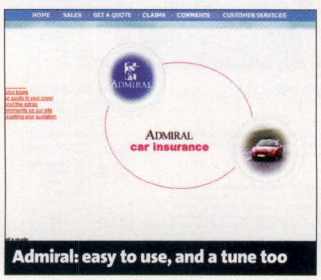
www.directline.com/motor ★★★

Direct Line has one of the shortest and simplest forms to fill in, but if you are on a slow connection, you can expect some interminable waiting about for the various elements to load. It's nice that you can tweak things on the fly like the amount of excess you are willing to pay, but then, while the quote is re-calculated, there's that excruciating wait again. Most irritatingly, rather than letting you make a number of alterations and then manually request a re-quote, changing any element at all, such as un-clicking a radio button, causes the entire page to automatically recalculate. Very, very slowly. At least the quote was relatively competitive, and given the brevity of the form, those on an ISDN connection or with a lot of patience will find this an impressive and very quick to use site.

ADMIRAL

www.admiral.uk.com ★★★★

No one enjoys filling in forms, but while it might be waxing lyrical to suggest that Admiral has achieved perfection, this is undoubtedly an extraordinarily fine effort. For starters, you need fill in only 10 quick questions to get an initial ballpark figure, and if you like the sound of that, you can move on to get a formal quote. That requires you to answer a few more questions, though even this in itself can be a pretty quick process. For instance, as long as you have your car registration to hand, there's none of the picking your way through lists of makes and models that many other sites insist upon: Admiral will precisely identify your car from their database. Finally, you can tweak the quote to your heart's content, but be warned that the initial ballpark figure can take a pounding once you start refining the details. The ease and simplicity of use certainly make it worth a look. But no, we haven't given it an extra star for the cheery hornpipe it plays when you first boot it up. Though we were tempted.



Admiral: easy to use, and a tune too

Diamond: a girl racer's best friend

DIAMOND

www.diamond.uk.com ★★★

We've all heard the arguments about the driving abilities of women, and you've probably got your own opinion (which may depend in part upon your gender). According to specialist insurer Diamond, women have the same number of accidents as men, but because men tend to wrap their cars spectacularly round lampposts while women just have the occasional gentle scrape, female claims cost less. That's why Diamond is in the business of offering insurance to women only. Many insurance sites have a connection to Admiral, and the form at Diamond is quite literally the same as Admiral's, and, oddly, at first glance retains the option to specify a male or female driver. However, on careful consideration, this not so much a glaring error as a clever inclusion, because when you succumb to the obvious temptation to compare quotes by gender, the difference is significant. However, the final quote was only marginally more competitive than that offered by Admiral.

The search delivered the goods with a hefty saving

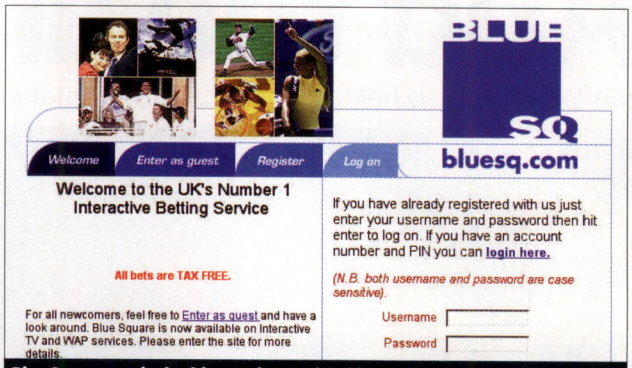
FIREBOND

www.firebond.co.uk ★★★★

Finding an insurer willing to provide cover for unusual vehicles is a bit of a problem, and it's not surprising that given the dizzying variety of strange automobiles available, online quoting is sometimes not very feasible. So when you come across someone willing to insure something as exotic as a dragster, you can forgive the company a slightly more primitive approach than the mainstream companies. That said, Firebond offers a fantastic range of policies, and at least as far as classic cars are concerned, you're in with a good chance of coaxing an online quote out of their system, due in no small part to some nicely comprehensive help files. Firebond will also cover such things as modifications and exotic paint jobs, so if you've turned your Mini Metro into a mobile disco, this is definitely an excellent first port of call.

@ CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials



Blue Square: you're backing a winner with this true Internet success story

INVESTING

The Motley Fool UK
www.fool.co.uk
One of *the net*'s favourite sites, offering helpful advice for the learner investor.

Ask Figaro
www.askfigaro.com
Compare financial products' results at a glance here.

Investment Week
www.invweek.co.uk
Top monetary advice from the in-depth *Investment Week*.

MONEY NEWS AND SHARE PRICES

FT.com
www.ft.com
The mother of all money sites, from the makers of the pink-paged financial bible.

Stocktrade
www.stocktrade.co.uk
Keep your finger on the pulse with this site, which offers real-time prices.

UK-iNvest.com: Around the Tipsters
www.ukinvest.com/perp/tipsters.html
The top one-stop shop for share tips.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Interactive Investor
www.iii.co.uk
Advice for individual investors.

Tax Assist Direct
www.taxassist.co.uk
Help with the taxman for small business and investors.

PAYING BILLS ONLINE

Servista
www.servista.com
Pay one e-bill for all your utilities on this innovative site.

Powergen
www.powergen.co.uk
For convenience and savings in your utilities bills.

BUDGETING

This is Money
www.thisismoney.com
The *Daily Mail* shows you how to hold on to your purse strings.

Guardian Unlimited – Money
money.guardian.co.uk
Right-on money guide with news and features.

GAMBLING

Flutter
www.flutter.com
Where you can be the bookie or the punter.

Oddschecker
www.oddschecker.com
Make sure you know who's offering the best odds.

Blue Square
www.bluesq.com
Probably the biggest choice of bets on offer.

Tax Assist Direct: avoid nasty surprises

NEWSGROUP

misc.industry.insurance
Share your insurance concerns.

MAILING LIST

Email ***insuranceinfo-subscribe@topica.com*** for explanations of all types of coverage.

NEED MORE? **This month's bargains** Dealfinder p24
Useful money addresses The Directory p84

FOCUS:// Homework made easy

And the answer is...

Don't spend hours helping the kids with homework – just point them towards the power of the Internet

The music teacher didn't like Jenny's teapot impersonation

DISCOVERYSCHOOL.COM

www.discoveryschool.com

★★★★★

Back in 1996, the absurdly-named BJ Pinchbeck ('my friends call me Beege...') became one of the Web's first – and most precocious – real-life celebs. At the tender age of nine, the young Netizen and his father devised a vast collection of educational links called the Homework Helper which saw him appear on the likes of *Oprah* and his site garner masses of column inches and visitors. Now, predictably, Beege has sold out and amalgamated his site with the Discovery Channel, though none of the original magic has gone in the process – while it might sound distinctly underwhelming, the Homework Helper contains the sort of endlessly useful links we simply didn't find through any other methods, such as ***sparknotes.com***, a free online collection of literary notes which will do away with the need to buy study guides ever again. Throw in a dictionary which allows for inaccurate spellings and a pretty decent encyclopaedia for geographic, historical or scientific enquiries and you've got a real gem for online learners.

HOMEWORK HIGH

www.homeworkhigh.com ★★★★

Shame on you for believing Channel 4 was purely the preserve of puerile animation and dodgy foreign films with too much flesh on display. Actually, it's home to a whole raft of innovative and useful sites at ***www.channel4.com***, including homes, careers and cars. Homework High is arguably the pick of the bunch, offering rapid responses to queries from secondary school children, though parts of it may be useful to all ages. The format here is as simple and effective as the consistently brilliant navigation: choose your subject from English, maths, science, geography, history or French and search the archive of previously-asked questions by keyword for answers from a panel of teachers and experts. If you can't find what you're looking for, an answer to your query is promised the same day (or instantly if you log in during one of three weekly 'live' sessions). OK, so getting the answers isn't exactly the best way to learn, but full marks for effort all the same...

BBC SCHOOLS ONLINE

www.bbc.co.uk/education/schools

★★★★

Anyone brought up from the 70s onwards will recall with a mixture of horror and post-ironic amusement the 'educational' Beeb programmes they were forced to sit through during their childhood, in which hideously outdated presenters fronted frequently patronising and unintentionally comic shows on all manner of scholarly subjects. It's good to see, then, that Auntie has dragged herself into the 21st century with this slick, navigable and (gasp!) enjoyable site. Full marks for including material children of all ages can use – as well as *Teletubbies* and *Tweenies* sections for basic numeracy and literacy, there's GCSE and AS-level revision guides, tests, games, careers advice and sections for parents and teachers. Most sections link through to related TV shows – though you'll

@ If you have to bookmark one.../

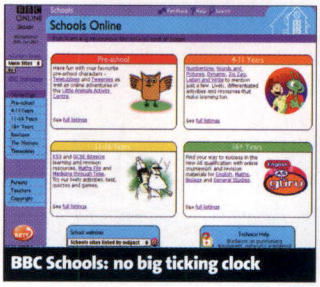
HOMEWORKHELP.COM

www.homeworkhelp.com ★★★★★

You've got to hand it to the Americans: they don't do anything by halves. The very fact that Homeworkhelp is based across the Atlantic will put off many (and it's true that cultural differences do make certain parts of the site inaccurate or simply unsuitable for the British student), but the sheer volume of facts, advice and hand-holding here makes it by far the best resource for kids of all ages. Homeworkhelp boasts over 1300 tutorials suitable for all levels of academic accomplishment and split into maths, English, the sciences and history: within each subsection you'll find facts, exercises and tutorials for each facet of the subject, clearly-written and fully illustrated. It's all backed by a multimedia gallery offering sound and video files for certain lessons, a cram guide for exam revision and 100 downloadable study skills lessons which help with note-taking, revision methods and exam preparation. While other sites send kids in a hundred different directions for hard facts, Homeworkhelp houses the lot under one roof: and, best of all for parents, while rivals seem determined to help youngsters cut corners rather than learn for themselves, this site is comprehensive and clear enough to encourage actual learning.

Homeworkhelp: comprehensive schooling for students

WORDS: ROBERT JEFFERY; PICTURE: KOBAL



BBC Schools: no big ticking clock

probably want to set the video rather than sit up for an hour of cell biology at 4am...

TOPMARKS EDUCATION

www.topmarks.co.uk ★★★★

Anyone who's ever tried to research a subject over the Web will realise that it's something of a double-edged sword: yes, you can find just about anything you want and more besides – the devotion lavished on obscure subjects is occasionally overwhelming – but the problem of getting straight to the information you need when confronted with hundreds of resources. Which is where Top Marks comes in, having categorised and reviewed over 1400 scholarly links for every school subject. Don't bother with the browsing facility but stick instead to straightforward keyword searching, which yields some impressive, not to mention up-to-date, results.

S-COOL!

www.s-cool.co.uk ★★★

Forget the cringeworthy name – S-Cool is actually a lot more straightforward and sensible than you might expect. Simply choose your subject from the list available (and all the major ones are covered) select from GCSE or A/AS-level and you're away. The list of essays and study guides here is still a work in progress, meaning there's no guarantee you'll find what you're after, but it shows promise at least and gains marks for accessible, if slightly over-colourful, design. The real boon here, though, is the Careers guide, which asks you to agree or disagree with a series of pretty non-specific statements ('It is hard to upset me') before suggesting a wild array of careers from police officer to accounts manager and linking through to actual vacancies for school-leavers. Not faultless, but great fun for the already-employed.

LEARN.CO.UK

www.learn.co.uk ★★★

While many of the sites here veer towards the over-friendly, Learn – part of *The Guardian*'s excellent stable – could do with lightening up a bit. From its fusty design to its frequent disclaimers and over-elaborate explanations, it's all a bit diffi- »

LINKS ;-) UNIVERSITY LIFE

Good morning campus

First it was drinking games, lewd jokes and free Instant Messaging. Then came the rise of the teen dot com multi-millionaire. It seems the Web has always been a haven for youth and students in particular – and even though e-commerce might have replaced tomfoolery as the wired world's pre-occupation, it's still uni life that powers cyberspace.

The Web was invented on campus, and over 15 years on from those first forays in computer networking, it remains a student's playground. Though they might not be the most affluent group, students have been quickly identified by marketeers as pliable, techno-literate and willing to use the Web for almost anything. A recent study found a third of them accessed the Web daily, and were amenable to spending cashon CDs, tickets and study aids. Naturally, there's a rash of sites and services only too willing to help part them from their cash.

Students will use the Web for almost anything

So don't despair if you're about to make the move from home life to a campus existence for the first time: the Web is your constant companion. The hand-holding begins right from the outset. With those A-level results in the bag, the first hurdle to clear in your quest for learning is obtaining a university place: thankfully, the process is made considerably easier by the efficiency of the Web. The UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) site at ***www.ucas.ac.uk*** includes a course search facility and an online application process. If you find yourself stuck in the clearing system, The Guardian has its own micro-site at ***www.guardian.co.uk/clearing*** dedicated to finding you the right place, including email alerts of available courses and plenty of advice. See ***www.uni4me.com*** for a pretty decent explanation of how the whole system works. If your ambitions are more of a global nature, try World Of Study (***www.worldofstudy.com***), which links through to available places worldwide: want to learn about public relations in the Czech Republic?

If you're wondering which university offers you the best opportunities, both social and academic, help is at hand. *The Independent*, that champion of the student cause, has a fine A-Z of seats of learning at ***advancement.independent.co.uk/higher***, which provides performance records for each college in the UK, as well as the social life and the cost of living in the area.

The support doesn't stop when you actually reach your chosen seat of learning. Though it's our sad duty to report the demise of the Books4Beer Web site – which aimed to help students swap unwanted textbooks for drinking money – there are a number of other services available. We were impressed with Virgin Student (***www.virginstudent.com***), the Bearded Wonder's laudable attempt to empower the nation's youth by flogging them low-cost credit cards. To be fair, though, there's a lot more to the site than links to the rest of the Virgin Empire: discounts and deals offer savings online and offline, while the Finder service helps you locate housing, supermarkets and even hairdressers in the vicinity of your university.

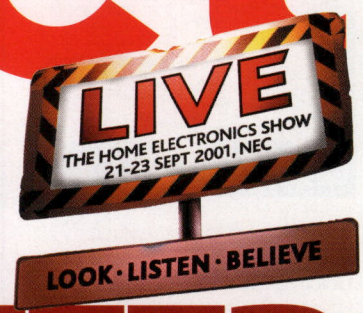
And then there's frivolity: The Complete Student (***www.thecompletestudent.co.uk***) has a massive compendium of drinking games, jokes and cocktails if you're willing to wade through some of the most appalling grammatical errors ever committed to page.

In fact, when you throw in the full range of study and reference guides available online, there's no reason to ever leave your dorm. Now all you have to do is scrape together the spare cash for your connection...

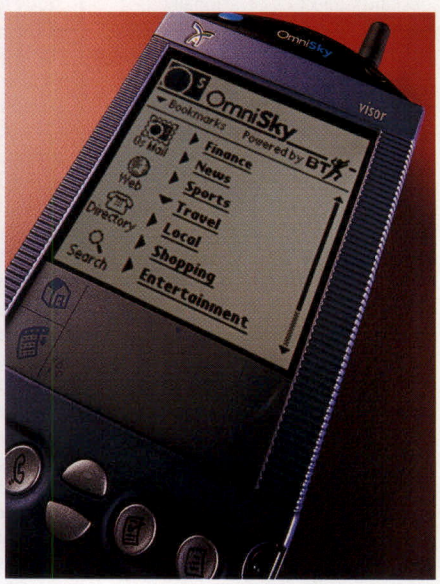
Students: will happily share banners with peaceful messages, but don't you dare swipe their sausages from the fridge

the net

LIVE 2001 READER OFFER



Get free tickets for your visit to the UK's biggest technology show



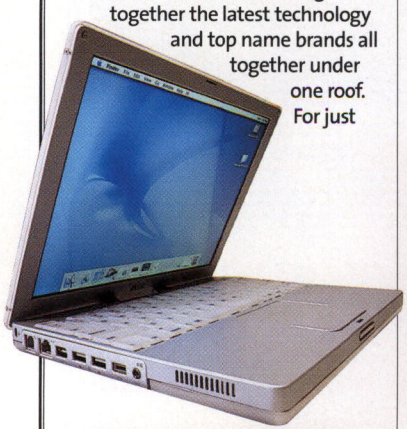
THE NET HAS TEAMED UP WITH LIVE 2001 to offer its readers a fantastic three-for-two ticket deal to the UK's biggest technology and home entertainment show.

LIVE is *THE* event that brings together the latest technology and top name brands all together under one roof. For just three days you'll be able to touch and try the sexiest products and gadgets on the market while soaking up the exciting and vibrant atmosphere that only LIVE can offer. What more could you ask for from a great day out?

LIVE 2001 will take place at the NEC in Birmingham from 21st – 23rd September. Visit the Web site at ***www.liveXpo.co.uk*** to find out more about LIVE, take part in our fantastic competition and make sure you register to get the latest updates on what's hot and what's new at LIVE.

The net, *Stuff* and *What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision* magazines are supporting LIVE, so make sure you visit their stands at the show – where they'll be showcasing the latest from the worlds of Web technology, hi-tech gadgetry and great-sounding hi-fi – and get to meet the editors and staff face to face. It's the show no fan of cutting edge technology can afford to miss. **See you at the NEC!**

Offer applies to advance bookings only. Offer can not be used in conjunction with any other ticket offer. Information correct at time of going to press.



Buy 2 tickets to Live 2001 and get a third FREE – that's a saving of £10.50
Simply call the ticket hotline on

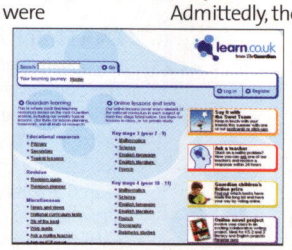
0870 9020444

Quote reference MTH

DVD	HI-FI	AUDIO	MP3	3G	BLUETOOTH	MOBILE
INTERNET	CONVERGENCE	MULTIMEDIA	WAP	HOME CINEMA	ONLINE GAMING	GPRS

FOCUS:// Homework made easy <cont>

cult for the young, or young-at-heart, to get into. Once you've found your way around, there are plenty of resources, covering most of the major school subjects through revision guides and tutorials. The search engine is highly effective, too, and we were impressed by the interactive Revision Planner which lets you timetable your studies effectively – be warned, though, that many of the best parts of the site require registration.



Homework need never be arduous again...

HOMEWORK ELEPHANT

www.homeworkelephant.co.uk ★★★★

So named, we suspect, because an elephant never forgets – unlike the rest of us, who've forgotten most of what we learned at school within a couple of years of leaving. Still, if you're keen on boosting your chances of retaining some information, this is a pretty good place to start: every school subject is covered in depth, and finding your way round couldn't be easier. There's little in the way of original content here, but the links are extremely well-organised and fully reviewed and rated, with multimedia sites marked out for special attention. The homework tips and tricks are useful, too: and like Homework High, there's an Ask The Expert feature if you're really stuck.

COURSEWORKHELP

www.courseworkhelp.co.uk ★★★

Let's get one thing perfectly clear before we go any further: CourseWorkHelp is not about cheating, it's about helping. Ok? So even though other people have posted their coursework online for you to download, that's not an excuse to copy it, as the site makes clear in a huge disclaimer before it lets you into the content proper. Admittedly, though, the basic premise of this site is tempting in the extreme to the corner-cutting student: select your subject and up pops a list of previously-submitted essays from other pupils. You can use them to 'help' you as you see fit: the site just asks that you hand your own coursework to them in return. Innovative, for sure, but there's no guarantee that the homework you copy is correct...

ALGEBRA ONLINE

www.algebra-online.com ★★★★

There are few more loathsome subjects for the average pupil than maths and, let's face it, algebra is the lowest of the low. Algebra Online takes the pain away with its soothing mix of advice, chat, mailing lists and interactive tuition, all of which make it among the best subject-specific sites around. The real clincher, though (and this will come as a huge relief to both kids and their long-suffering parents), is that the site does away with the need to spend hours struggling with impossible equations: it does them for you. Visit the QuickMath section, type in your task, inequality or equation and the answer is online a click away. Homework need never be arduous again.

Homework Elephant: just one question – how does an elephant hold a pencil?

@ CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials

FIND A COURSE

Hotcourses
www.hotcourses.com
Enormous directory featuring everything from puppetry to earth science.

Learn Free
www.learnfree.com
Free online courses using videos.

LEARN ABOUT COMPUTERS

About Computing
home.about.com/compute
A vast amount of information on every aspect of computing.

Learn That
www.learnthat.com
General site including computing help for beginners and novices.

LEARN A LANGUAGE

Travlang
www.travlang.com
Learn to get by in almost any language on the planet.

Learn Spanish
www.studyspanish.com
Pay for the premium service and its audio CDs, though the free standard course will still get beginners speaking the lingo.

LEARN AN INSTRUMENT

Cyberfret
www.cyberfret.com
Straightforward texts for budding guitarists, with video examples.

The Drum Club
www.thedrumclub.com
Assumes nothing of the beginner.

ENCYLOPAEDIAS

Online Dictionaries, Glossaries and Encylopedias
stommel.tamu.edu/~baum/hyperref.html
Large list of online resources.

Webopedia
www.pcwebopedia.com
Specialises in IT topics.

Funkand Wagnalls.com
www.funkandwagnalls.com
Selection of historical articles and a perspective on modern events.

CONVERTERS AND SYMBOLS

MegaConverter 2
www.megaconverter. com/mega2
Convert just about any measurement to another.

Symbols.com
www.symbols.com
Online list of graphic symbols you never quite understood.

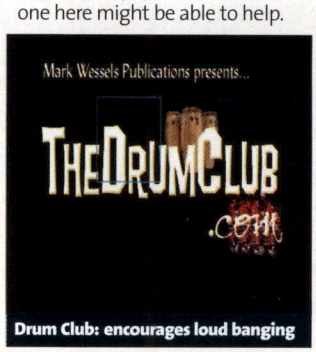
QUOTATIONS AND PROVERBS

Bartleby.com
www.bartleby.com
Quotes to spice up essays, letters and speeches.

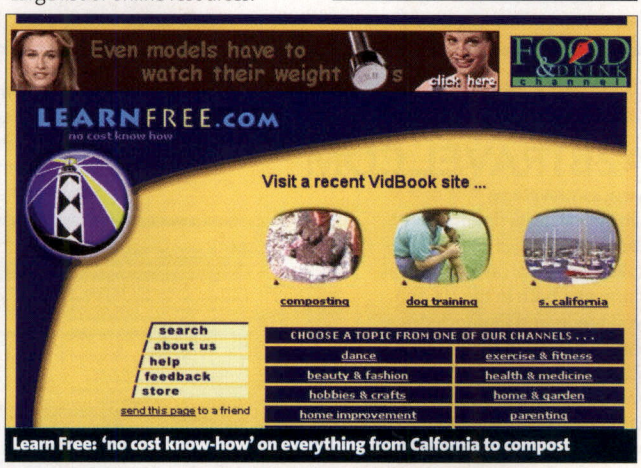
Famous Quotations Network
www.famous-quotations.com
Search for quotations by country or author.

NEWSGROUP

alt.school.homework-help
Just can't understand that trigonometry question? Someone here might be able to help.



Drum Club: encourages loud banging



Learn Free: 'no cost know-how' on everything from Calfornia to compost

NEED MORE? **Useful addresses for kids** The Directory p84

FOCUS:// UK hotel finders

Say farewell to hotel hell

Don't set out for a night on the town or a week in the country without finding accommodation online...

Sadly, there are no details on the hoteliers

SMOOTHHOUND

www.smoothhound.co.uk

★★★★★

Don't be put off by the rather crude design: this site is easy to use and comprehensive, with over 10,000 places to stay. Find your target on the map or the list, then view the hotels offered. In addition to room rates and facilities, many have their own 'brochure' with a photographic tour of the establishment and a friendly narrative by the proprietor. But don't take their word for it: SmoothHound has included AA, RAC and English Tourist Council star ratings. Complete the online availability request form and you'll shortly get a response direct from the hotel, even if it's not online (it will receive your email as a fax).

@ If you have to bookmark one...

A2BTRAVEL.COM

www.a2btravel.com ★★★★★

a2bTravel has its fingers in just about every travel-related pie – holidays, flights, car hire and rail journeys – both in the UK and worldwide, and that includes a particularly deep-filled pie for UK accommodation. It claims to have over 33,000 places to stay on the database, and while that includes campsites and cottages, B&Bs and hotels clearly make up a significant share. The search facility is straightforward: click through the list of regions to find the nearest town, or type it straight in (worth doing, as not all towns are actually listed). Then choose from criteria such as accommodation type, budget and facilities, including wheelchair access and en suite bathrooms, to view results.

a2b: helps find a place to rest your weary head

The results are usefully listed in order of distance from your chosen town, though you can also view each one on a zoomable map showing other local towns. Details of each establishment are usually brief but include good photos, and by clicking the option to view only those which you can book immediately, you can choose from a large selection that allow you to check availability first. A fully comprehensive and very convenient site.

LASTMINUTE.COM

www.lastminute.com ★★★

The original and still the best for most things left late in the day, Lastminute.com earns a place here not least for the option to view your search results on a zoomable map, allowing you to choose the hotel with the best location. That said, the site seems to cover only larger towns, so you'll be lucky to find something in one of the smaller holiday destinations: there was nothing for Penzance in Cornwall, a popular town covered by every other site we tried. Search criteria are limited – you won't be able to specify facilities or pet-friendly places – and the details for the hotels offered to tend to brief, though they're usually sufficient to make a choice. But it's nice to have the freedom to check availability.

AA

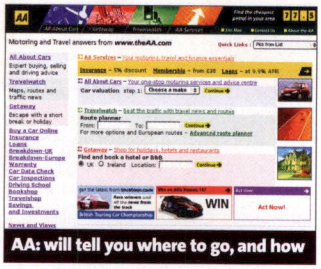
www.theaa.com ★★★★

Drivers will find it useful to view A- and B-roads for even small towns on the map here, but a hotel search is best done by text alone, entering your destination name along with type of accommodation and budget. Like Lastminute.com, the AA's site usefully shows your results on a map, so you have the option to choose your accommodation according to its location. But where the site really comes into its own is with the AA diamond ratings, a reliable and respected guide to the standard of your lodgings. Each entry enjoys a short but helpful summary, often with a photograph, plus details of facilities, services and room rates, and many allow you to check for availability of rooms before going through the booking request process. Those that don't will reply to your request within 24 hours. Being the AA, the site also provides local directions and a route finder for your entire journey.

HOTELWORLD

www.hotelworld.com ★★★★

A smart and professional-looking site, though with considerably fewer hotels in its database than other sites, Hotelworld starts by allowing you to be truly picky about your hotel, offering specifications from 'all seaside accommodation' to as particular as only hotels with



AA: will tell you where to go, and how

facilities for children, conferences, tennis and golf, even 'peace and quiet'. For a special weekend you might want to choose deluxe or gourmet hotels, or those with an emphasis on health and leisure.

If you don't have time to wade through all your results, choose those showing green buttons: these come with a promise of detailed information plus an online booking service in real-time; red-buttoned hotels may require you to rely more on your own intuition, and take 24 hours to email a response to your booking enquiry.

TRAVEL CHECK

www.travelcheck.com ★★★

Travel Check is something of a hoteliers' free-for-all. Anyone, it seems, can load details and photos onto the site for free. As a result there's no quality control here – other than existing ratings from the AA and such – and it'll come as no surprise to find every hotel blowing its own trumpet. However, this accessibility also means that Travel Check has one of the largest databases of accommodation to choose from. Easily the most useful aspect of Travel Check is that almost every entry offers the facility to instantly check availability online before going through the booking process. The option to view accommodation in nearby areas if nothing is available in your chosen town would be more useful if those areas were less broad; still more of a pity was the frequent absence of address or offline contact details for the accommodation shown.

VIRTUALHOTELS

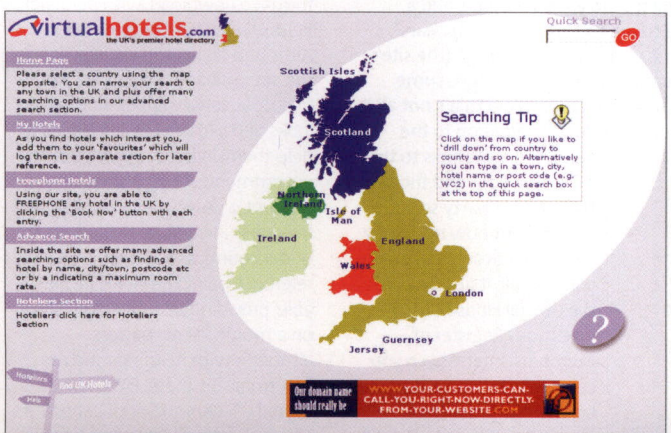
www.virtualhotels.com ★★★

Once you've searched for your main region at Virtualhotels, it's easy to see which towns offer the best choice of accommodation, the number of places to stay being shown alongside each one listed. With such a baffling choice for each town, you can make life simpler by specifying the type of room you want and, most importantly, how much you're willing to spend. Most results will show good photographs of the hotel or B&B, and you can find out exactly where each is by consulting its individual location map. A brief but straightforward editorial and a basic guide to tariffs is just about all you'll find on what each hotel has to offer, so you'll have to wait until you enquire about availability to find out about the facilities. But you don't want the expense or hassle of calling or emailing them yourself: supply your phone number and they'll call you back as soon as you want instead.

PLACES TO STAY

www.placestostay.com ★★★★

Another site, like a2btravel, with world domination in mind, the best method at Places to Stay is to key in your destination name on the homepage, along with the dates you plan to stay. The site seems to be aimed primarily at American visitors, so that most of the map regions are too broad for a quick search and locations listed tend to by organised by city, with smaller towns omitted. But it's still a useful site, with green and red colour-coded results of your search showing at a glance which establishments have rooms available when you plan to visit, though there's always the option to check alternate dates. Each hotel or B&B is presented with a photograph and brief but adequate texts including all the basic details and rates. You can then go ahead and make your reservation online in a matter of minutes.



Virtualhotels: a welcome chance to hear the phrase 'don't call us, we'll call you'

WORDS: ALEX NEWBY; PICTURE: BBC PICTURE LIBRARY

@ CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials

Teletext: late deals aplenty if you need to escape in the blink of an eye

TOP ONLINE FLIGHT DEALS

Avro
www.avro.co.uk
Low-cost flights to the Med.

MyOwnPrice.com
www.myownprice.com
This site asks how much you're prepared to pay and then tries to match it. Very useful.

Deckchair UK
www.deckchair.com
Comprehensive flight-finder.

CheapFlights.com
www.cheapflights.com
Where thrifty surfers go for flights, packages and late deals.

DESTINATION INFO

Rough Guides
www.roughguides.com
From the publishers of the well-established guidebooks.

Lonely Planet Online
www.lonelyplanet.com
Let the travel experts guide you around your destination.

Beeb.com – BBC Holiday
www.holiday.beeb.com
Offers advice on everything you'll need for a perfect break.

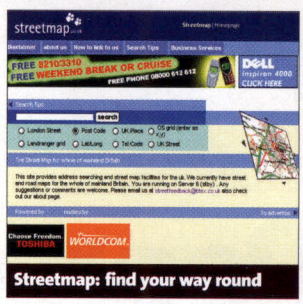
Guardian Unlimited Travel
travel.guardian.co.uk
Wordy site with eco-friendly tips.

Bugbog
www.bugbog.co.uk
Impartial info and honest photos.

LAST-MINUTE BREAKS

Teletext-Holidays
www.teletext.co.uk/holidays/whatnew.asp
Loads of late deals, plus handy chunks of travel news and advice.

Cheaperholidays.com
www.cheaperholidays.com



Streetmap: find your way round

Not the best-looking site in the world, but the bargains available here soon make up for that.

Shenfield Travel
www.shenfieldtravel.co.uk
A thorough site packed with great deals. However, there is no online booking at the site so it's back to the good old telephone.

GET AROUND THE UK

The UK Travel Guide
www15.pair.com/cir
A portal to loads of useful sites.

Streetmap.co.uk
www.steetmap.co.uk
Zoom in to every street in the UK, and in some cases even closer. An essential bookmark.

ROUTE PLANNERS

Shell Geostar
www.shellgeostar.com
European guide complete with details of nearest available loos.

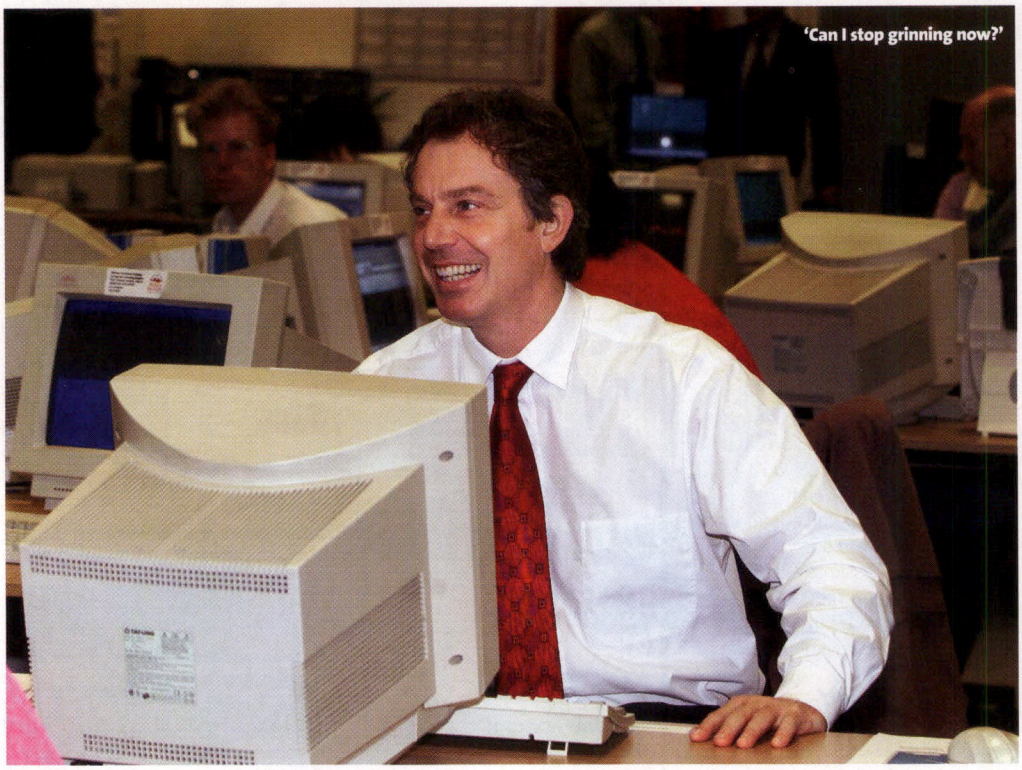
Michelin Travel
www.michelin-travel.com
Everything you'd expect from the top name in tourist guides.

NEWSGROUP

ed.accommodation
Private ads for every kind of place to stay, here and abroad.

NEED MORE? Useful travel addresses The Directory p84

FOCUS:// Government online


'Can I stop grinning now?'

People power up

Government's gone wired – but what can the powers that be do for you online?

UKONLINE.GOV.UK

www.ukonline.gov.uk ★★★★★

This site has the modest aim of telling you 'all about government', and it seizes upon its task with a frankly unbecoming amount of enthusiasm. The sheer volume of information contained here is actually quite frightening, with link upon link directing you to all corners of cyberspace – or at least the ones with a government representative. Easy to navigate, the site lulls you into a false sense of security by its use of child-friendly primary colours and easy-to-read section headings, encouraging the casual surfer to get out of their depth. In addition to a newsroom with all the latest government details, and an editor's update which encourages you to contribute to online discussions, be sure to check out the open.gov section: an extensive A-Z of government listings and services. Enter and be amazed by the amount of items there are to tell you about; who knew there was so much involved in running a small(ish) country?

DRIVER AND VEHICLE LICENSING AGENCY

www.dvla.gov.uk ★★★★

Presented in an accessible style and packed with information, the DVLA has produced a site that very probably contains all the information you'd ever need from the driving authority. Although easy to get round, the site provides a generous amount of information for vehicles along with the requirements for drivers and licences. It also deals with the commercial side by providing information on contracts and how to tender for them. The site is dipping its toe in the waters of online form-filling, but it's obviously unsure of the temperature judging by the paucity of available forms. But at least it's heading in the right direction.

DTLR

www.dtlr.gov.uk ★★★

Transport is a subject that everyone is guaranteed to have an opinion on, and a subject that everyone can be guaranteed to agree on: that provisions for transport – both public and private – are pretty poor. So if you're one of the many with the constant refrain of 'something must be done!', log on here to the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions to find out what – if anything – is being done. Detailed and thorough, the site is nothing if not informative, so you're bound to find the answer to at least one question here – although it's not the height of interaction: you can download a few documents and that's about it.

INLAND REVENUE

www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk ★★★★

Despite recently winning a 'raspberry' accolade in the New Statesman and BT New Media Awards for having one of the worst Web sites in public life, the Inland Revenue is soldiering on. And in a pretty helpful manner: with tax self-assessment season upon us, the site has the forms to download, with plenty of helpful hints in filling them out. Although bland and visually boring, the site manages to provide a pretty decent service (albeit not in the looks department) in helping us to help them. In keeping with other government sites the sheer amount of information available to look up is incredible, all filed away under countless sub-headings. As a reference point the site is invaluable, providing instant clarification on a multitude of matters – although with headings such as 'Electronic Business: PAYE/NIC & Payroll – Technical Specifications' its aim is clearly not to entertain. But, hey, it is the Inland Revenue...

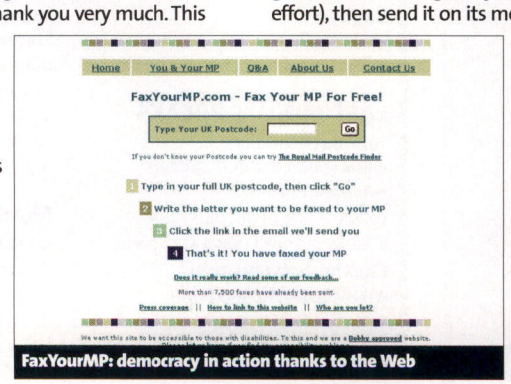
@ If you have to bookmark one...

FAXYOURMP.COM

www.faxyourmp.com ★★★★★

No clever names here resulting in endless confusion as to what a site exactly does, thank you very much. This award-winning site does exactly what it says in the address bar, in a straightforward manner – although, let's face it, how complicated could faxing your MP be? This excellent site works because of its beautifully simple premise: why should contacting your elected MP require such a major effort on your part when you can make use of modern technology and reach them quickly and easily? And, if even that seems like too much effort, this does all the hard work of finding addresses and formatting letters for you. Simply type in your post code, and a blank fax, addressed to the MP in question, appears.

All you have to do is write in your message (the site's good, but not that good; you do have to make some effort), then send it on its merry way. And that's not all it does. In addition to the faxes, there are links to the MP's own sites and those of the relevant party so you can find out how busy they have – or haven't – been on your behalf. It also links to the official House of Commons Register of Members' Interests, so you can see exactly what might be diverting your MP's attention. Brilliantly simple, and simply brilliant.



FaxYourMP: democracy in action thanks to the Web

WORDS: CLAIRE MCHATTIE; PICTURE: PA

THE UNITED KINGDOM PASSPORT AGENCY

www.ukpa.gov.uk ★★★★

Nearly, but not quite: the Passport Agency's site is conducting a trial run in online passport applications but, to be quite honest, it sounds so confusing that we wouldn't blame anyone for getting disheartened with the process and giving up. But we suppose they have to start somewhere... Anyway, apart from that, this is yet another government site that falls over itself in trying to be helpful. Details of how to apply for a passport, what you need when applying, eligibility and what to do about a name change are all subjects covered online. The site also gives out travel advice and answers questions on visa requirements; plus it offers a passport application tracker service so you can work out if your passport will get back to you in time for that once-in- a-lifetime trip.

Most sites fall over themselves trying to help you

NHS DIRECT ONLINE

www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk ★★★★

This is the support site to the NHS Direct phone line, providing help and advice on countless health-related topics. However, you can't email queries; it's strictly phone questions only. Although the Web needs more medical sites like it needs more doomsayers, as you'd expect from the NHS's official online presence the information contained here is solid and thorough. And as it's in partnership with the NHS Direct phoneline, any further questions are but a call away. Style is obviously not a major consideration but the site's easy enough to get round with subjects neatly divided into categories and sub-categories with lots of general health advice to consult. A nice bedside manner – and it won't mind being woken at 3am.

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND SKILLS

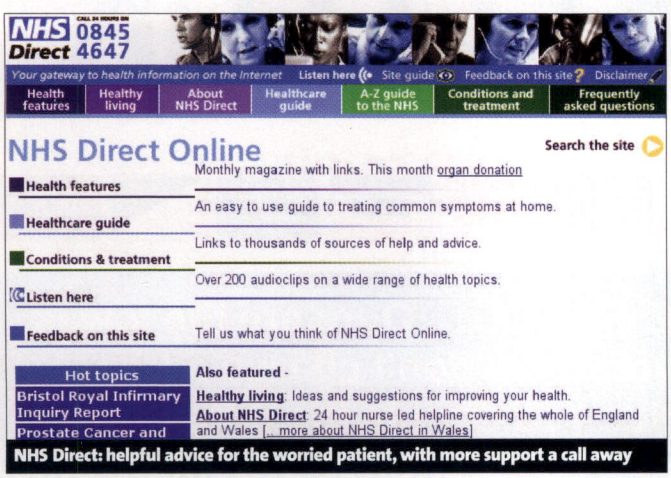
www.dfes.gov.uk/index.htm ★★★

Like a one-stop shop, this site offers info on all things educational: from finding out about skills shortages and teaching reforms to the national curriculum, you'll be able to investigate it here. Like all the other government sites we visited, the design is nothing to get too excited about, but the info is detailed and will probably tell you all you needed to know and probably a bit more besides. And not only is this a useful resource for parents wondering what the next miracle method is to prop up our education system; teachers can also use it to get an idea of what they're expected to teach.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMISSION

www.eoc.org.uk/index.html ★★★

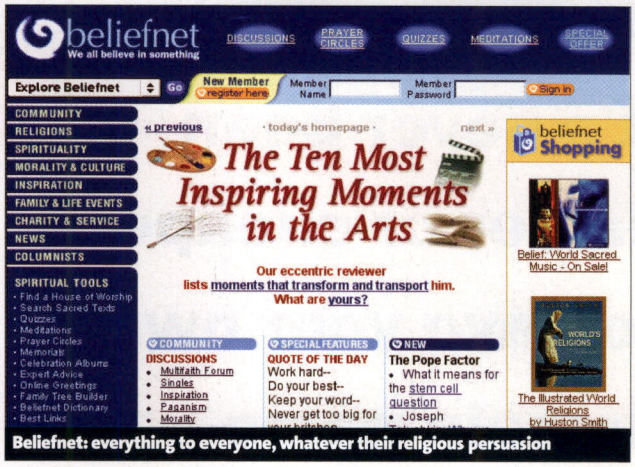
Although this site doesn't do itself – or its subject – any favours in the layout department, the content is presented in an approachable, campaign-for-plain-English kinda way. This is an excellent reference resource if you think you're being unfairly treated at work – for both men and women. The site contains details of discrimination cases that have been won, plus information on what is acceptable – and unacceptable – in the workplace. It details here, too, the battle for equal pay and equality in parenting.



NHS Direct: helpful advice for the worried patient, with more support a call away

@ CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials



Beliefnet: everything to everyone, whatever their religious persuasion

WEDDINGS

Web Wedding
www.webwedding.co.uk
Features an easy-to-use interactive planner.

Confetti.co.uk
www.confetti.co.uk
A big site for a big day.

Wedding Guide UK
www.weddingguideuk.com
Huge but easily navigable site including everything the groom and best man will want to know.

Weddings.co.uk
www.weddings.co.uk
Couples wishing to marry abroad can find the legal requirements for over 20 countries here.

ROYALTY

The British Monarchy
www.royal.gov.uk
Find news on the royals past and present, plus photos and tour info.

Royal Families of the World
www.royalfamily.com
Provides links to both official and unofficial sites of monarchies all over the world.

William-Online
www.william-online.co.uk
Everything you could want to know about the nation's prince charming.

Diana, Princess of Wales
www.diana.org.uk
A calm and balanced look at the life of the Queen of Hearts.

World Book Elizabeth II
www.worldbook.com/fun/queen/html/elizabeth.html
All the facts you need know about her Maj, plus diplomatic mention of ones you don't.

RELIGION

Beliefnet
www.beliefnet.com
Portal encompassing all beliefs and religions.

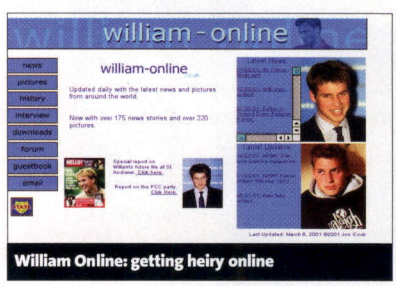
Buddhanet
www.buddhanet.net
Superb resource for all things Buddhist.

Jewish.co.uk
www.jewish.co.uk
News and views for UK-based Jews, including a popular 'Ask The Rabbi' feature.

Muslim Directory
www.muslimdirectory.co.uk
Muslim businesses and groups.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

London Ambulance Service
www.lond-amb.sthames.nhs.uk
Info, news and links to health sites and other UK ambulance services.



William Online: getting heiry online

London Fire Brigade
www.london-fire.gov.uk
With safety tips and photos to ensure London's not burning.

Police
www.policecouldyou.co.uk
Recruitment site with local links.

MAILING LIST

Subscribe to UK-Policy via ***www.topica.com*** to discuss politics and policy issues with others.

NEED MORE? **Hundreds of addresses** The Directory p84

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- Holding page wizard • Change name servers
- Change IPS tags (UK domains)
- Full domain management

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* +registration fee: £2.50 per year. US domains: £2.29 + registration fee: £6.70 per year. Prices exclude VAT

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**See website for full terms

THE INTERNET NOW

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The latest from the UK's No. 1 for the Internet

OCTOBER 2001 NEWS 79 | SHOPPING 81 | WHAT'S ON FREESERVE 82 | A-Z CHANNEL GUIDE 82

Chat www.freeserve.com/chat

Get closer to the stars

New technology at Freeserve Chat brings users face to face with celebrities

Anyone taking part in a celebrity chat at Freeserve can now feel even closer to the stars, thanks to the introduction of a major new technological feature to this hugely popular area (*www.freeserve.com/chat*). In addition to the usual celebrity chat service, where registered users can ask star guests questions by sending them instantaneous online messages, Freeserve will be Webcasting live images of selected celebrities as they chat online, enabling you to view guests as you chat and making the experience even more thrilling.

Recent guests at Freeserve Chat have included top pop artist Wyclef Jean and the band allSTARS, who each took time out of their hectic touring schedules especially to talk to Freeserve users. Tennis ace Greg Rusedski and cricket star Darren Gough also took breaks from their respective schedules to chat exclusively online. Glitzy author Jackie Collins made her second appearance to talk about her latest novel. And since the enormous success of the live Web chat with pop trio Destiny's Child in April, more and more celebrities have been waiting to take part. Guests planned for future chats include pop sensations Ricky Martin, J-Lo and Jessica Simpson.

Destiny's Child: their chat on Freeserve in April was a huge hit

PICTURE: COLORIFIC

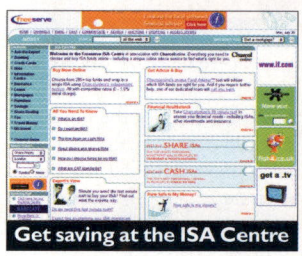
Also new to Chat is Live Answers, a hybrid between live chat and online message boards which has proved very successful in expert chats, notably with Sex and Relationships expert Anna Raeburn, who has her own live spot every Wednesday evening at icircle, the Freeserve Women's channel (*www.icircle.com/relationships*). In Live Answers, questions are submitted by users and then held in a queue. The guest can then choose which questions to answer – say, the ones which will interest the most viewers – and, if he or she likes, type the answer him- or herself, rather than going through a moderator. Questions and their answers are then displayed in a menu, allowing users to select the ones they'd like to read.

With Celebrity Webcasting and Live Answers, Chat is now bigger and better than ever. Try it for yourself and find out what special events are coming up next by going to *www.freeserve.com/chat*.

Money www.freeserve.com/money

Turn pennies into pounds

Whether you've £50 to invest or £50 million, choosing the best place to put it can pay substantial dividends. Freeserve Money has plenty of advice on how to do this, and its latest addition, a new ISA Centre in association with finance experts Charcolonline (*www.freeserve.com/money/isacentre*), will ensure that you make the most of every penny.



Get saving at the ISA Centre

Among several free interactive tools at the Centre is a Financial Healthcheck. This 10-minute test examines your current financial situation by asking you a number of pertinent questions. For example, do you have a mortgage to repay? Have you set aside a lump sum in case of emergency? Will your family be secure if you are unable to bring

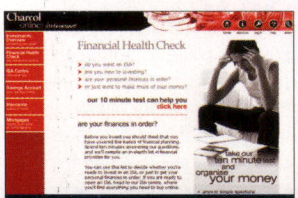
continued over >>

Money www.freeserve.com/money

>> (continued from page 79)

home a salary because of sickness or redundancy? As you answer these and other questions, the Financial Healthcheck will compile a list of financial options you might want to consider, such as income protection insurance or investment in a tax-free Individual Savings Account (ISA). You can read more about any of these once you have completed the test.

From your answers, the test identifies your financial priorities and the best ways to make your money work for you. If one of these is an ISA, you'll benefit from another interactive tool, the Fund Adviser, which will help you decide exactly where to invest your money. By asking you all about your personal financial circumstances and objectives, the Fund Adviser will determine exactly how much risk you can take with your investments. Then, by combining



Charcolonline will help

this information with its own analysis of the current ISA market, it will pick the funds that are right for you.

To make investing in an ISA even easier, Money has brought together over 250 of the top funds at Charcolonline's special Independent Service. Rather than contacting several different investment companies, this enables you to buy any combination of funds online, within just one account. There are also a number of exclusive deals, so you'll be saving right from the start.

Because the ISA Centre is online, you can come back whenever you want to find out how well your investment is growing, buy more funds, or simply give your money another Healthcheck to make sure you finances are on course to making you richer. *www.freeserve.com/money/isacentre.*

Travel www.freeserve.com/travel

Long-haul gives quick fix

A long-haul short break might seem like an exhausting and stressful way to get away from it all for a few days, but according to the experts, it's one of the best ways to de-stress. 'The sheer physical distance you are from home means you switch off more readily,' says occupational psychologist Cary Cooper.

That said, you'll need to choose your destination sensibly to make the most of your holiday time. There's no point trying to cram all of Orlando's theme parks into a single weekend, or trying to head off on an Asian backpacking trail. The key word here is compact: think small island, city or beach – and near to the airport.

You'll need to be organised. Prevent delays by booking a scheduled flight, and one which arrives at your destination in time for you to enjoy most of your first day. Pack only hand luggage so you won't have to wait for yours at the other end, and book rooms and car hire in advance. Within an hour of landing you should be in your room or on the beach, not at the airport information desk trying to find somewhere to sleep. For your return, book a flight that gets back in time for you to go straight to the office, maximising the time you spend away.

Of course, unless you choose a directly southern destination, you're going to suffer from jetlag. Try and adjust yourself a little beforehand; natural sleeping tablets and wake-up aromatherapy oils can also help.

Bear these issues in mind, though, and all you need is an open mind. Then the world's your oyster. Book your break at *www.freeserve.com/travel.*

Step off the plane, onto the beach

Business www.clearlybusiness.com

Make your dream come true

Get all the advice you need to get started

Almost all of us dream of starting our own business at some point during our lives, but only a few manage to do it; still fewer make a real success of it. If you're thinking of setting up your own venture, make sure you avoid disappointment and considerable financial loss by getting it right from the start. You can do this by getting expert help and advice at the new Start Up area at Clearlybusiness (*www.clearlybusiness.com/startup*). Here you'll find all the information and tools to help you at every stage, from doing your initial research to getting your business up and running.

Once you've got an idea for a business, the very first thing you'll need to do before you can go any further is find out whether there's a market for it. The Market Research section is an invaluable resource for this, giving you a proper feel for the market you are about to enter and indicating whether there is a strong potential or existing demand for your product or service. With access to relevant industry reports, you'll be able to understand your customers and how much they'll pay for your product, helping you decide whether yours will sell.

If you're confident that your product or service has potential, you'll find plenty more information, tools and services to help you shape, develop and implement your business idea. From writing a business plan to getting the right kind of funding for your venture and understanding the legalities of forming a new business, you'll find everything you need.

And once you've got your business going, Clearlybusiness will keep supporting you with advice on how to promote yourself both online and off, with guidelines, costs and case studies showing how others have managed to succeed.

Find out whether your business has got what it takes, and how to make it happen, by logging on to *www.clearlybusiness.com/startup.*

PICTURES: RETNA

powered by freeserve www.freeserve.com

Learning
www.freeserve.com/learning

Learn and play – at the same time

Spark Island: something for all ages

Primary school children now have their own area at Freeserve Learning (*www.freeserve.com/learning*), where the curriculum-based Spark Island and Whizzkids.com enable kids to continue with their learning at home, while having fun at the same time.

There are lots of colourful characters to meet at Spark Island, which is aimed at 3-11 year-olds: there's Farmer Rumtum at Spark Park (for 3-5 year-olds), for example, and the streetwise kids of Sparkopolis. (for 9-11 year-olds). In each area, children will get to test out their maths, English and science skills with a variety of interactive games. Parents, too, have a place at Spark Island, where they can find out all about their child's school life as well as their general development, and there's also a section for especially for teachers.

And if your kids need to brush up on their general knowledge, too, point them towards *Whizzkidz.com*, a free interactive game zone where 4-11 year-olds can also put their maths, English and science skills to the test. Whether they need to learn the names of different dinosaurs or the major capital cities of the world, find out about the solar system or improve their punctuation, it's all here. Find Whizzkids.com and Spark Island at *www.freeserve.com/learning/primary*.

Shopping
www.freeserve.com/shopping

SHOPPING

Pushed for time? Shop online

Don't panic about getting to the shops; get everything you need from the new-look Freeserve Shopping channel

Now that the holidays are over and the kids need ferrying to and from school again, it's can be difficult to find time to get to the shops – and with autumn weather drawing near, it's unlikely to be a pleasant experience in any case. So what better way to get everything you need than buying it from the Freeserve Shopping channel at *www.freeserve.com/shopping*. From CDs to sportswear, computers to cookware, you'll find just about anything you could want. You can even buy your groceries online, and like everything else at Shopping, have them delivered straight to your door. And as if Shopping wasn't exciting enough already, it has just been given a brand new look and a number of new partners, making it even bigger and than before.

OVER 100 STORES, ALL IN ONE PLACE

There are over 17 departments at Shopping, from Music and Movies to Homes and Gardens, Computing to Health and Beauty, each with several easy-to-navigate stores. As well as plenty of online-only retailers, you'll also find many of the big highstreet names, such as Debenhams, Dixons, Homebase, Iceland and Thortons, so you know you won't be missing anything on the highstreet.

One of the major stores new to Shopping is Argos, known for its huge range of products and excellent value. Argos will feature in many departments throughout Shopping, such as Sport and Leisure and Homes and Gardens, and because it's online, you'll be able to enjoy all of its bargains without having to queue to make your purchase.

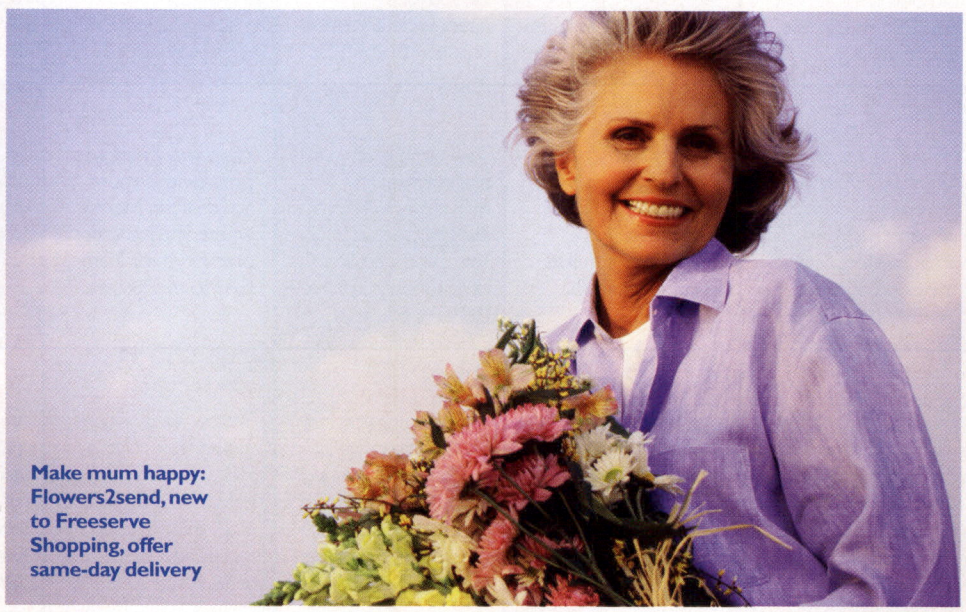
Also new to Shopping is the excellent flower delivery service Flowers2send. Flowers2send offer next day delivery and will take orders up to 6pm. And if you live in London, Manchester or Leeds they'll even deliver on the same day! A godsend if you're so rushed off your feet you've forgotten to send your mum a birthday present. You can even include your own personal message.

SHOP ONLINE WITH PEACE OF MIND

Shopping with your credit or debit card at Freeserve is a completely safe and secure method of paying for goods. Once you have submitted your card details, they will be used only for the transaction you have indicated, and will not be disclosed to any other party. And because every store at Freeserve Shopping has made the Freeserve Promise, you can be certain that you'll always get a reliable and fair service.

It's not just the convenience of Shopping at Freeserve which makes it such a great place to shop. You'll also find all sorts of special offers, many of them exclusive to Freeserve, so that you'll make loads of great savings, too.

Be the first to find out about all the latest offers by subscribing to the Shopping newsletter at *www.freeserve.com/shopping* to receive a free email direct to your inbox, telling you what to look out for. That way, you can really make the most of Shopping.


Make mum happy: Flowers2send, new to Freeserve Shopping, offer same-day delivery

PICTURE: RETNA

What you'll get from Freeserve

FREE INTERNET CALLS

Everyone uses the Internet in different ways. Some use it for work; others browse in the evenings at home; still more just check their email a couple of times a day. So Freeserve has a choice of great-value packages to suit every kind of user. For detailed information about AnyTime, HomeTime, No Ties and our high-speed service Freeserve Plus, visit *www.freeserve.com/time*.

EMAIL

Email allows you to send messages all over the world, at any time of the day or night, and receive a reply within seconds. With Freeserve, email is completely free; all you pay for is the cost of the connection to the Internet.

MOBILE INTERNET

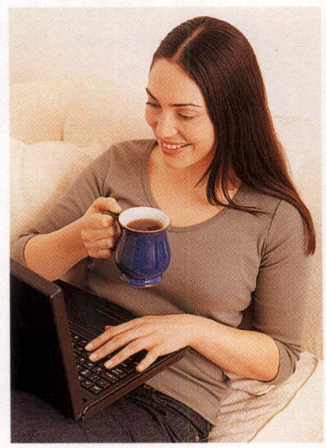
Because email is sent to and from computers, there's always the worry that you're missing vital messages whenever you're away from your PC. But with a mobile Internet (or WAP) phone, you can access your emails whenever you're away from your PC. To find out how, visit *www.freeserve. com/mobile*.

TALKING EMAIL

If you don't have a mobile Internet phone, you can still access your emails when you're away from your computer – by using Speechmail, a clever service which reads your email messages to you. Find more information at *www.freeserve.com/communications*.

YOUR OWN WEB SPACE

Once you've started looking around the Internet, chances are you'll be keen to build your own site. That's easy when you become a Freeserve member. We'll give you a massive 15 megabytes of free space in which to create your own site. The software on the free installation CD, which you can use to sign up as a member, makes it easy to get your site up and running. With Freeserve, you'll soon be at home on the Internet.



THE BEST CONTENT

As well as offering so many great services to Internet and mobile phone users, Freeserve is dedicated to bringing you the very best content on the Internet and collecting it all on the Freeserve Today page at *www.freeserve.com*. Make Today your homepage to get an instant digest of all the latest news, weather and sport whenever you log on to the Internet.

FREESERVE FOR EVERY PART OF YOUR LIFE

Freeserve has 18 excellent channels, one for every part of your life, from Lifestyle to Careers, Sport to Business, Health to Money; Shopping has everything you could possibly want, and there's a whole channel for Women. And our email newsletter will keep you up to date with everything that's going on at Freeserve. *www.freeserve.com*

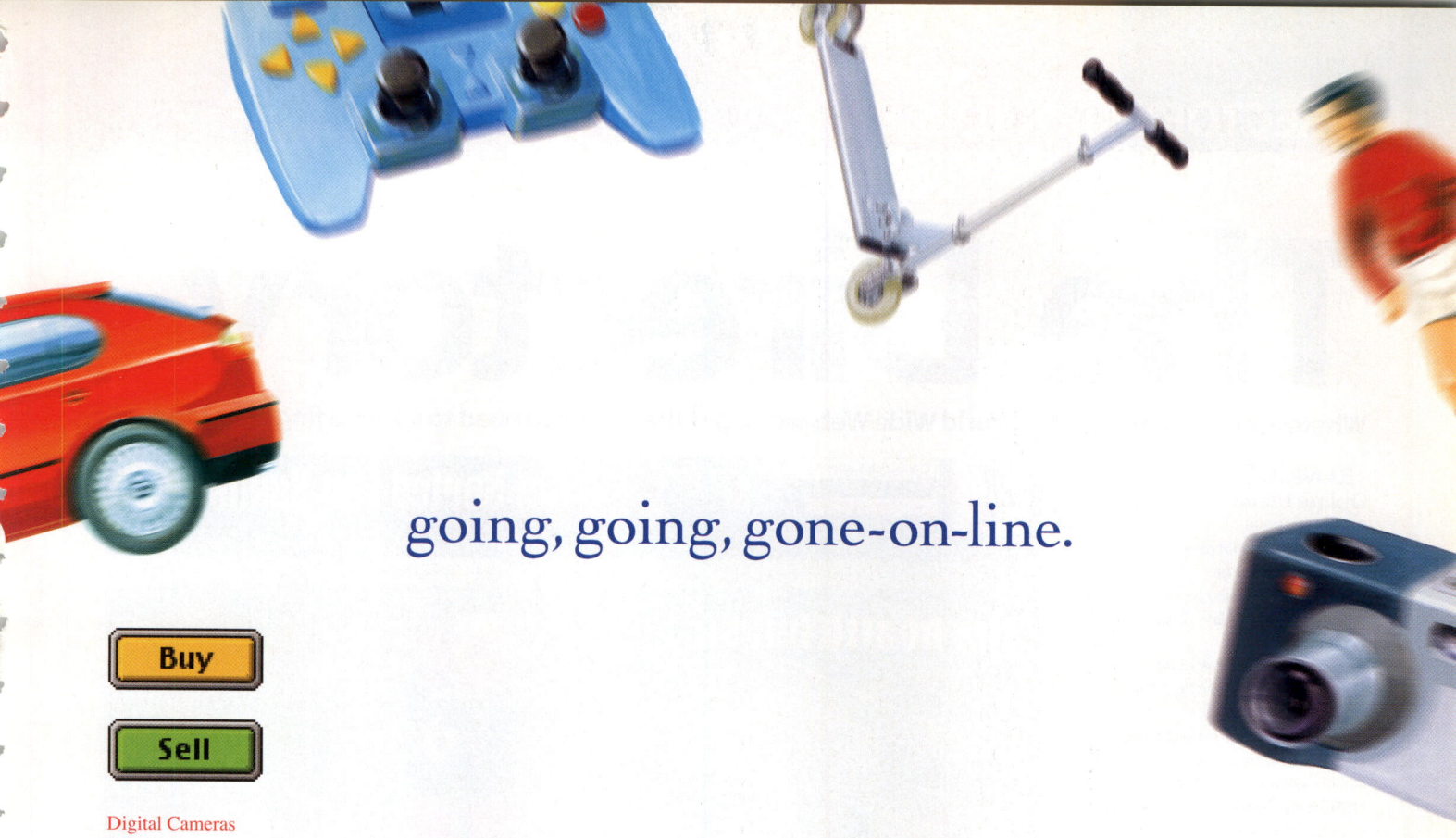
Sign up online at www.freeserve.com or use the free Freeserve installation CD available from Dixons, Currys, PC World and The Link – or call 0800 970 8890 to have it delivered to you direct.

A-Z CHANNEL GUIDE

WITH 18 CHANNELS TO CHOOSE FROM, THERE'S SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

Auctions The thrill of bidding for a bargain isn't restricted to the auction room. You can bid online for almost any item imaginable at FSAuctions.	**Business** Clearlybusiness can offer your business support and advice, and get you online, whether you're well established or you've just started out.	**Careers** You're wired, now get hired, not fired! Careers lets you search databases of 70,000 jobs nationwide and apply online with your CV.	**Chat** The new, improved chat service is a great hit. Here you can make new friends, set up your own chat groups; you can even talk to the stars!	**Entertainment** At Entertainment you'll find all the latest film, music, radio and television news. You can buy CDs, books, DVDs and concert tickets here, too.	**Games** If you're a computer games fanatic, this is the place to come to read reviews of the latest games, then visit the virtual shop to buy them.
Health Freeserve Health is full of information, advice and medical news to help you and your family stay in tip-top condition.	**Learning** From primary through to A-level and beyond, our interactive environment makes learning easier for all ages.	**Lifestyle** The Lifestyle channel is an exclusive magazine covering every aspect of your social and personal life, and much more.	**Money** Keep your finances in order with expert advice from Money, where you'll find tips on everything from ISAs to mortgages.	**Motoring** Get on the road with the Freeserve Motoring channel, your one-stop shop for all your motoring needs.	**News and Weather** Get tomorrow's papers today with this superb service delivering the latest news and weather.
Property From finding the right mortgage to sorting the decorators from the cowboys, on Property you'll find everything for your home.	**Search** Use Search to find anything on the Internet, including businesses and services, domain names and items	**Shopping** At Shopping you can find a huge range of items, from flowers or food to a CD or a computer. Look out for exclusive bargains, too.	**Sport** Football, rugby, tennis, cricket, motorsport, golf – the list goes on. Whatever your sport, you'll find the latest news and results here.	**Travel** Visit the Travel channel for instant access to a database of 70,000 flights and holidays worldwide as well as sensational last-minute deals.	**Women** For features, information and advice, Web women need look no further than the Freeserve women's channel, icircle.com.

PICTURES: RETNA



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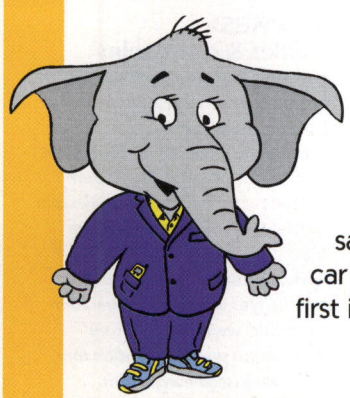

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Genuki ***www.genuki.org.uk***
Public Records Office ***www.pro.gov.uk***
Rootsweb ***www.rootsweb.com***
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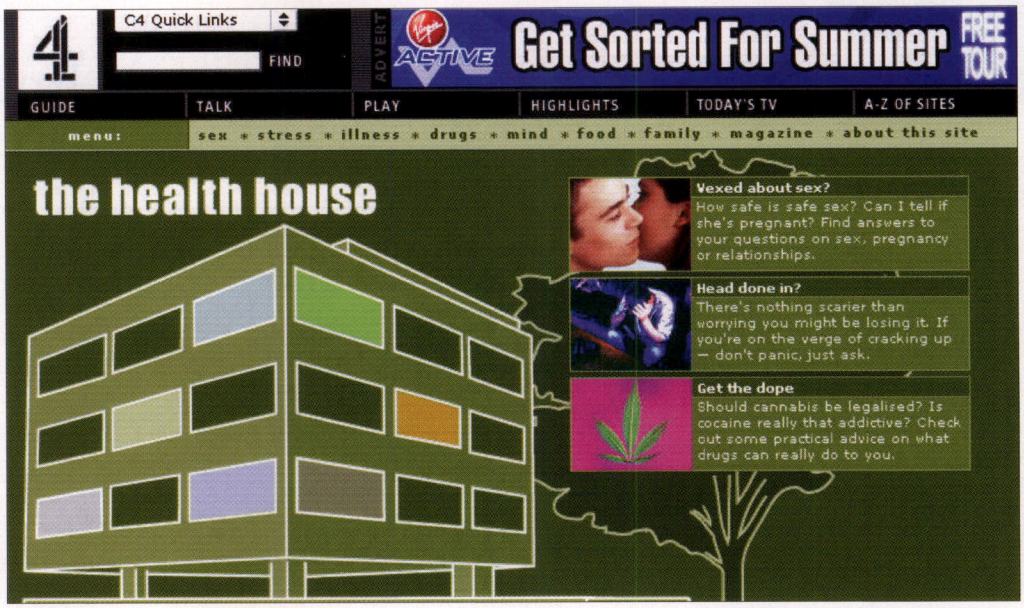

HEALTH NEW ENTRY

HOUSE OF NO PAIN

Channel 4's original sites on embarrassing illness, stress and sex were built to accompany and continue the issues raised by TV series. But as several more health sites have been created, namely those covering drugs, mental illness, eating disorders and family problems, so has a special home for them, at the Channel 4 Health House. Each room houses a different topic; sex, not surprisingly, will take you through to the bedroom; food to a kitchen and a fridge full of goodies. Moving your cursor over the different objects in a room will reveal links to the options on offer. Don't Panic provides immediate advice for those in a hurry; Get Help is a database of organisations and resources where you can get further help; the Magazine presents extensive articles and advice. It's surely no accident that the House covers issues that people find it hard to talk about out loud. Here you can do it online in complete confidence: post your problem and get a personal response within a day. ***www.channel4.com/health***

WORDS: ALEX NEWBY

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www.pharma-lexicon.com
Pocket Doctor
www.pocketdoctor.co.uk

Support & information
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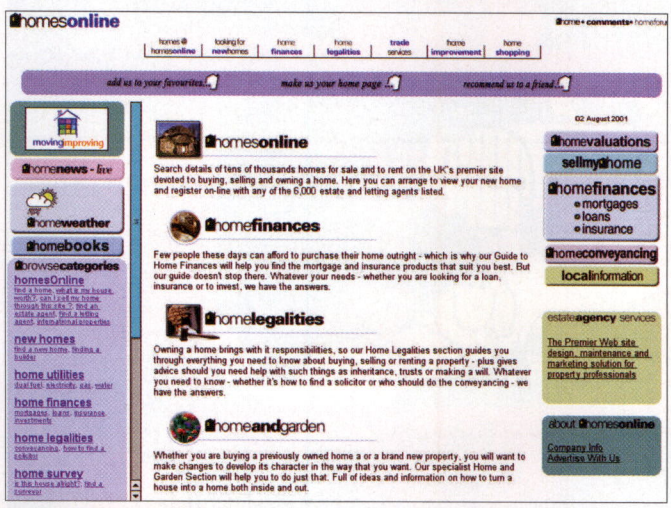
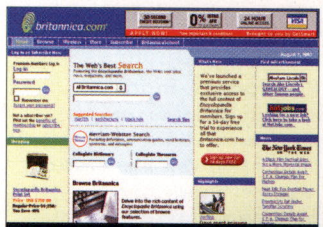


HOMES NEW ENTRY

DON'T CALL US, WE'LL CALL YOU

In addition to an impressive database of existing properties, both old and modern, across the UK, Homes Online also has a database of new homes by over 500 developers. Indeed, some are so new that all that exists of them at present is a plot of land and some plans. But if nothing takes your fancy when you visit, you can request an email every time something meeting your requirements – location, number of bedrooms and price – is added to the site. There are easily navigable online services for the home-buyer, and vendors will benefit from a free online quote on the value of their home, which they can then sell via the site.
www.hol365.com



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Teen Scene ***www.teen-scene.com***
Thunk ***www.thunk.com***
Wizziwiz.co.uk ***www.wizziwiz.co.uk***
Yahooligans ***www.yahooligans.com***

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Desktop Lawyer
www.desktoplawyer.freeserve.net
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Law Rights ***www.lawright.co.uk***
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www.worldwidelearn.com

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Orange ***www.orange.co.uk***

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Radio On The Internet ***www.radio-on-the-internet.com***

LEARNING NEW ENTRY

PLAYTIME FUN FOR KIDS

Kidstime is a delightful site aimed at 3-7 year olds, offering animated stories and lively interactive games to develop language and visual skills. While a paid subscription provides access to a wider range of areas, there's plenty here that's competely free. Kidstime knows that small kids get bored in seconds; even as stories and games download, there's something for them to fiddle with. In addition to the Storytime Shoe and contemporary *Mr Men* and *Little Miss* tales, Baby *Wind in the Willows* invites kids to match the baby animals with their respective parents, while in Baby *Casper* they must help the infant ghost identify the different animal statues. Successful completion of puzzles is rewarded with genuine praise and sometimes with virtual stickers and puzzle pieces for the child's own area on the site. And it's compatible with child-protection software. ***www.kidstime.com***

Virgin Radio: top hits and sessions

<NEWS>
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Guardian Unlimited ***www.guardian.co.uk***
The Independent ***www.independent.co.uk***
MegaStar ***www.megastar.co.uk***
The Mirror ***www.mirror.co.uk***
News Of The World ***www.notw.co.uk***
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News services
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ValueMad ***www.valuemad.com***
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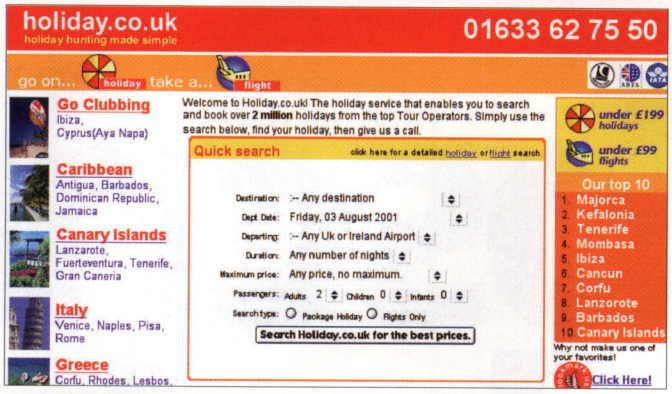

TRAVEL NEW ENTRY

CHEAP TURKEY, NO STUFFING

Of scores of late travel sites we checked, the unprepossessing Holiday.co.uk turned out to be the only one to find a flight to Antalya in Turkey for under £300. A fluke perhaps, but this is a satisfyingly straightforward site based on a mammoth database of more than 2 million holidays. It offers flights and holidays up to three months in advance. Users are given the flexibility to enter as little specification as a departure date, only later choosing to sort the results by price, destination and so on. And if money's your decider, go straight for holidays under £199 or flights for under £99; there was a refreshingly good selection to choose from.
www.holiday.co.uk

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Fishing ***www.anglersnet.co.uk***
Football ***www.football365.com***
Formula One ***www.itv-f1.com***
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www.motograndprix.com
Racing ***www.racingpost.co.uk***
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easyJet ***www.easyjet.com***
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Ryanair.com ***www.ryanair.com***
United Airlines ***www.ual.com***
Virgin Atlantic Airways
www.virgin-atlantic.co.uk

Ferries

Ferry Savers ***www.ferrysavers.co.uk***
P&O ***www.p-and-o.com***
Travel Britain ***www.travelbritain.com/UKPassengerFerries.html***
Travel.World ***www.travel.world.co.uk/ferries.htm***
UK Camp Site ***ukcampsite.co.uk***

Gift Delivery Company: to the door

Rail travel

Euro Railways
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Great Western Trains
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National Rail
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Railtrack ***www.railtrack.co.uk***
Scotrail ***www.scotrail.co.uk***
UK Public Transport ***www.pti.org.uk***
Virgin Trains ***www.virgintrains.co.uk***

Destination guides

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Australia ***australia-online.com***
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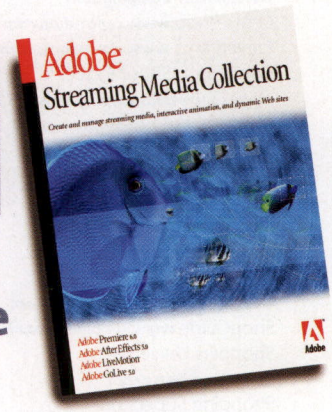

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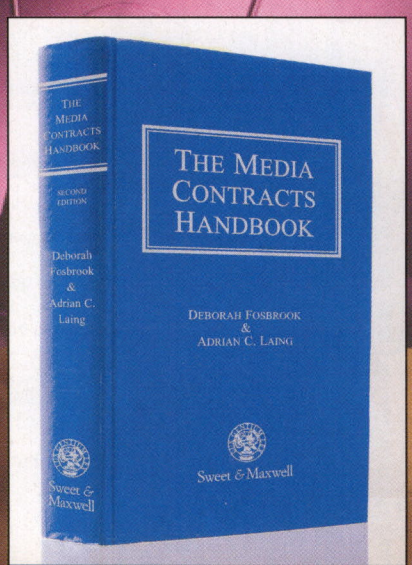

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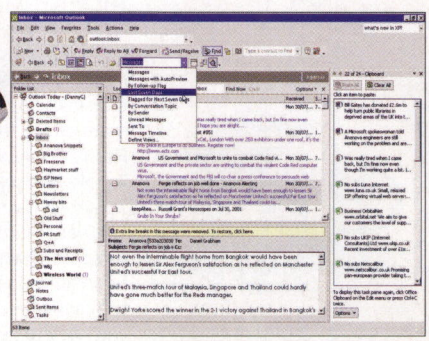

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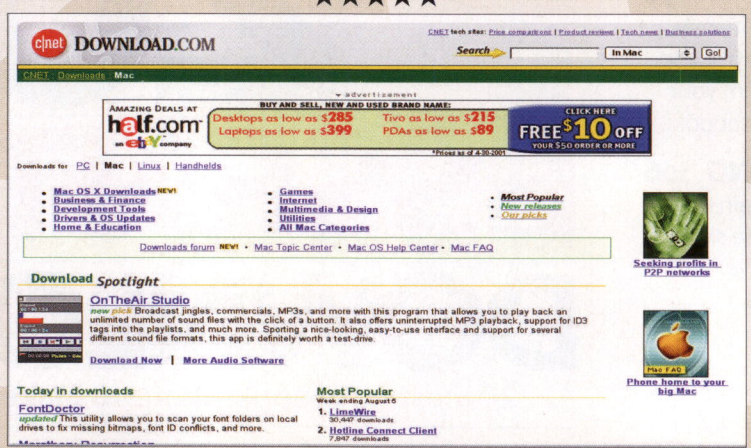
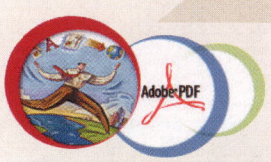
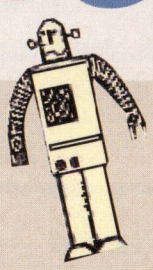






THE INTERNET IS FULL OF DOWNLOADS. New software, plug-ins, multimedia gadgets and thousands of other bandwidth-hungry applications that claim they'll enhance your life on the Web. Not to mention the thousands of Net games, Flash animations and other time-wasting bits and pieces around every corner.

But what you really need is to make sure your machine is stacked full of the most worthwhile software around. But how can you separate the wheat from the chaff? Here at *the net* we know that you want to get hold of the best software you can, so we've come up with a list of the 20 most worthwhile things you can ever download from the Net.

If you have problems downloading the software from the site given, try one of the major download sites. These are vast portals with access to huge numbers of FTP sites waiting for you to download until your heart's content. CNET's Download.com (***www.download.com***) and ZDNet's Download site (***www.zdnet.co.uk/software***) are the best ones to use – they are superb catalogues full of software which can be used on both the Mac and the PC.

So sit back, relax, and learn about how you can turn your computer into a lean, mean surfing machine...

1 BROWSER
Internet Explorer
www.microsoft.com
The best browser money can't buy

A browser is probably the most important piece of Internet software you can download. Originally Netscape (***www.netscape.co.uk***) was the king of the browsers, but now that crown belongs to Bill's browser. It's fast, flexible, and what's more, it won't ever cost you a penny. It's also future-proof, as a simple visit to the Microsoft site will provide you with all the updates you'd ever require.

Explorer is now in its fifth version on general release, and the super-keen can also download a beta version 6 of the browser from ***www.microsoft.com/downloads***. The version now on general release, 5.5, includes enhanced Favorites, History and Search functions. If you buy a new PC, Explorer is now so integrated with Windows that it's hard to see where the operating system ends and IE begins. The truth is, by making Windows Explorer fully integrated with IE, Microsoft did PC users a favour: there's now no laborious loading of IE – it's already there.

As far as the Mac is concerned, Microsoft has done a good job of producing an IE version 5 that overcomes the shortfalls of Netscape and builds on the flexibility of the PC version, thus pacifying those demanding Mac types. What's more, many other third-party companies are producing plug-ins, toolbars and buttons for IE.

However, if you're fed up with it, or you're one of the many agit-surfers resistant to the spread of Microsoft technology, you can always try the very capable and visually pleasing Opera, which you can also download free of charge from ***www.opera.com***. Netscape? Who needs it?

2 EMAIL CLIENT
Outlook Express
www.microsoft.com
More powerful with each version

On the face of it, Outlook Express hasn't changed all that much in recent times, but it's a staple of many an ISP's standard issue kit to customers. It would be nice to say that Outlook Express does so much more than a normal email program. But it doesn't – it really is simply an email program. It just happens to be extraordinarily good at what it does.

The only area in which Outlook Express transcends its boundaries is its newsgroup capabilities. The OE newsreader is pretty powerful and you can handily see your newsgroups within the same window as your email. Believe it or not, this is even better than Outlook itself, which actually uses the Outlook Express email reader to function. Newer versions (it's now on version 5) have included many improvements from the rather sluggish Version 4, including better address books and inbox rules (so you can direct email to other folders.)

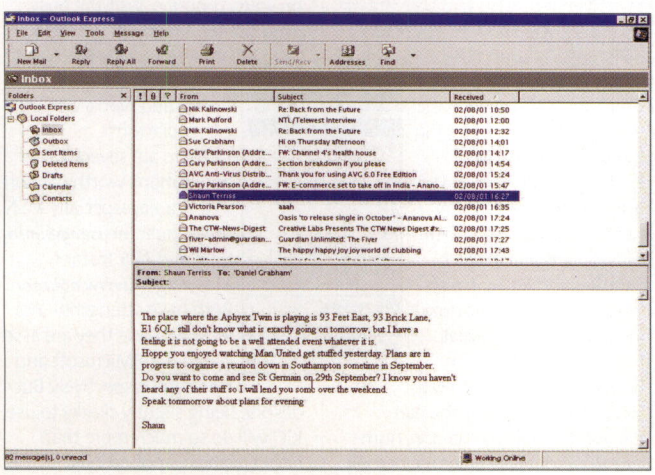
For ease of use and flexibility, it's Mr Gates all the way

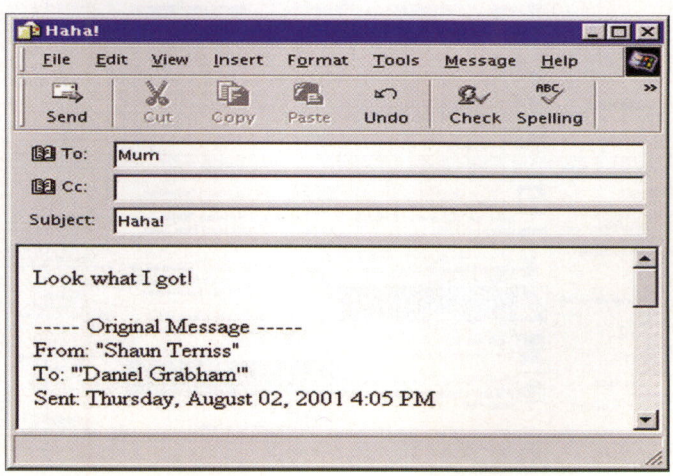
Version 6 looks set to incorporate many of the email enhancements which makes Outlook 2002 (included in the Office XP application reviewed on p116) such an attractive package. This will include full integration for Hotmail – you can already download a beta version from the Microsoft site.

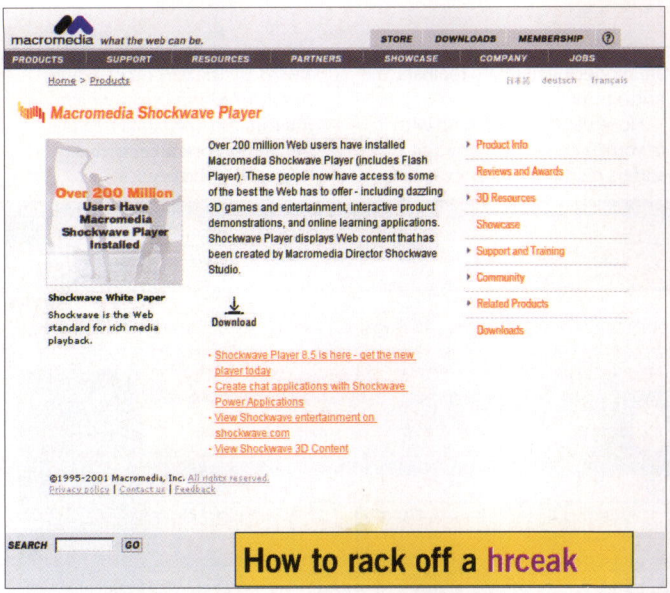
Even more impressive is the huge recent improvement of Outlook Express for the Mac. The latest version – 5.02 – is approaching PC levels of flexibility.

Email purists continue to sing the praises of the Eudora package (***www.eudora.com***) for its simplicity and ease of use. It's definitely worth a second glance and there are PC and Mac versions available.

But for ease of use and flexibility, even on a Mac, it's Mr Gates all the way, we're afraid... »







3 MULTIMEDIA
Shockwave Player *www.macromedia.com*
Everyone's favourite plug-in

The Shockwave player includes the legendary Flash player, but enables you to see much more complicated Web content and interaction to boot; Macromedia calls it the 'Web standard for rich media playback'. Over 200 million users have installed the plug-in onto their browsers. Shockwave takes Flash technology that one stage further and allows you to play interactive games and see Web applications created with Macromedia Director Shockwave Studio as well as Flash content created using developers' Flash software.

The download is over 3Mb in size, but it will be worth your while. The latest version of the player is version 8.5 (designed to show content designed in the latest version of the Shockwave software itself). Shockwave and Flash have become such a standard for the Web because the multimedia content that the software creates is extremely small and so can be downloaded quickly even on a 56Kb modem. The only problems occur when sites decide to show off (as they invariably do) and create too much Flash and Shockwave content. Then, more is most definitely less...

4 ENTERTAINMENT
RealPlayer *www.real.com*
The standard for streaming media

RealNetworks has long been involved in streaming media for the Web and has recently immersed itself in other projects, including being involved in the streaming of *Big Brother* in the UK. It was also part of CBS's *Big Brother* in the US through its subscription-based GoldPass system and has also been offering paid-for content (***www.goldpass.com***). GoldPass also offers Major League Basketball audio (***www.mlb.com***) as well as access to other Internet-based TV and radio stations. Real also owns 40 percent of the new MusicNet music subscription company, although the actual infrastructure won't be Real-branded.

The free edition of RealPlayer (RealPlayer 8) is extremely good, but obsessives may be well advised to shell out a bit of their hard-earned cash in return for the full version (it's $29.99, about £20). All the software includes the RealPlayer browser plug-in, allowing you to access RealAudio and Video content online. As a way of turning your PC into an all-singing, all-dancing player it's yet to be bettered.

Also worthy of note is Apple's QuickTime software, still generally regarded as the multimedia standard for the Mac (***www.apple.com/quicktime***). But RealPlayer has improved the Mac version of the RealPlayer in recent times and so it's our overall winner.

5 INSTANT MESSENGER
ICQ *www.icq.com*
Not the easiest application you'll ever use, but very powerful

ICQ ('I seek you') now has over 100 million users around the globe and is a huge online community. At its very basic level, it is Instant Messaging chat software, a way of chatting online with one or more fellow surfers. Every user has a unique number (ours is 108891310) which identifies you. You can also enter further user information and decide to reveal these details or not onto the White Pages (basically a directory of ICQ users). You can search for people by location, number, email address and name or look for them by interest or hobby. ICQ will even let you Instant Message mobile phones – recipients of text messages can reply to the ICQ client on your computer. Visit the busy Web site for a taster of what's on offer – the software is available for both the Mac and the PC and works well on either platform.

There are several other applications worthy of note in this area, especially MSN Messenger (***messenger.msn.com***) and AOL Instant Messenger (***www.aol.com***). Both have strengths – not least because they are associated with Microsoft and Netscape respectively. But despite being slightly clunky to use, ICQ will do so much more than either of those applications.

6 MP3 SOFTWARE
MusicMatch
www.musicmatch.com
Takes care of just about everything to do with MP3s

We've chosen MusicMatch because it is a superb piece of software on both Mac and PC. For PCs WinAmp (***www.winamp.com***) is also impressive, but the quality of MusicMatch's software has been winning fans across the globe ever since it emerged on desktops last year.

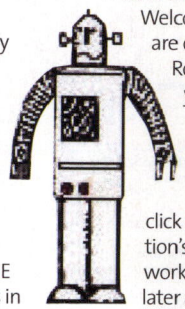
The basic MusicMatch player will let you play MP3s, CDs and even video, as well as letting you rip MP3s from CDs, tape and vinyl (through an appropriate device and with the lawyers on standby). It'll also effortlessly manage the creation of your own CDs from MP3 as well as help you to transfer your music to a portable MP3 player. In short, every possible facet of MP3 is covered under the one roof.

The download is a hefty 9.65Mb, so if you've got a free evenings and weekends deal, then set it going while the *EastEnders* omnibus is on.

There's a MusicMatch Jukebox Plus version available for $19.99 which is faster, as well as allowing you to keep on working while you're burning CDs or even stop the burning process and resume it later. It's also compatible with a larger variety of drives. But for most purposes the free player is more than sufficient – and worth the download time.

7 AUTO COMPLETION
AI RoboForm
www.roboform.com
It'll save you hours of time

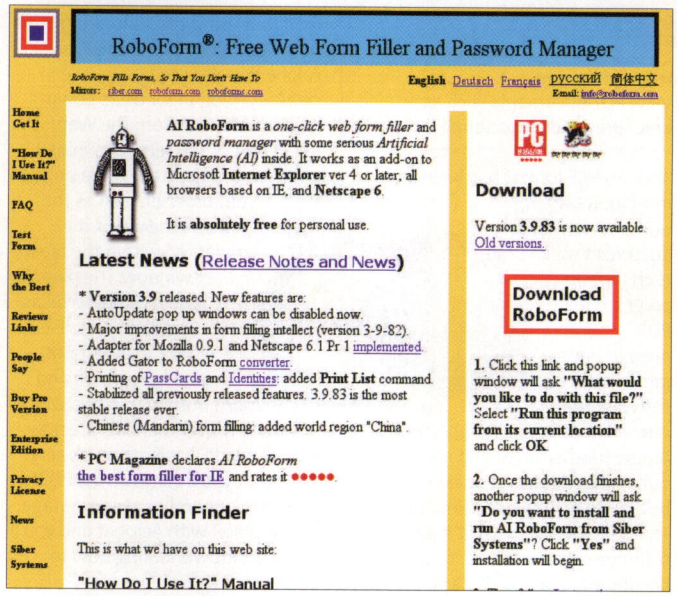
To most people, the term AutoComplete means absolutely nothing, yet they use it every time they use Internet Explorer. So you visited ***www.bbc.co.uk/football*** yesterday, did you? When you re-visit it today, typing ***www.bb*** will bring up the rest of the address. This is another of those handy features that IE has. Go to Internet Options in the Tools menu and you'll see AutoComplete under the Content tab. This is also the feature that saves your passwords and even gives suggestions for what you're typing in the search box on your favourite search engine.



It annoys many, but imagine if it could be made better, so that you'd never have to completely fill in a form on a Web page again.

Welcome to AI RoboForm. There are other form fillers, but RoboForm keeps a profile of you (even down to password-protected credit card details if you wish) and can be set to either automatically fill forms, or fill them at the click of a button on the application's toolbar. The application will work with Internet Explorer 4 or later and Netscape 6.

You can have several different identities (for all the family) and collections of passwords (PassCards). All in all, AI RoboForm is one of the best add-ons you can own.



8 DOWNLOAD MANAGER
Go!Zilla ***www.gozilla.com***
Never suffer the frustration of a broken download again...

Ever suffered the inconvenience of a download cutting out when it's nearly finished? Here's the answer. Go!Zilla integrates with your browser so that when you click on a link to download a file, it will save it to a list of files it is downloading.

Go!Zilla's main window shows you the list of files you are downloading and the status of the download and you can add files to your list by dropping them onto a 'target window' which 'floats' above your browser window. It's easier to use this 'Drop Target' feature when getting multiple files from your browser. You can even categorise your files.

The advantage of a download manager is that you can set it to download a multitude of files simultaneously. Downloads can also be started immediately, or scheduled for downloading later on in the day or even at a later date. For example, if your Net access is free at the weekend, you could save the downloads you've come across in the week for then. You can also drag downloads to the Go!Zilla window to add them to the file list.

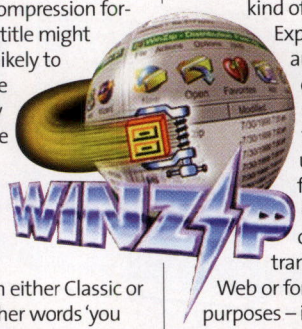
Best of all, you'll never again get to the '99 percent' stage of a download only to lose it forever – as with Go!Zilla you'll simply be able to complete the download later on.

9 COMPRESSION SOFTWARE

WinZip *www.winzip.com*

Compress your files in a jiffy

Zip (not to be confused with Iomega's bunch of drives) is the most widely-used compression format there is. As the title might suggest, you're not likely to find a version for the Mac, but also highly recommended is the similar Stuffit (***www.stuffit.com***) which is excellent for the Mac as well as the PC.



WinZip will run in either Classic or Wizard mode (in other words 'you do everything' or 'I'll do it for you' modes) but either works brilliantly. In essence, it enables you to shrink files down to a manageable size before you email them, and to decompress them at the other end.

The Classic interface is very similar to Windows Explorer but you can change back to the Wizard at any time. The Wizard builds on the kind of Wizards seen in Explorer and Outlook to automate the process of unzipping a file. In other words, it'll only take a few clicks to unzip and install your files – all in one go. Compressing your own files – for easy transmission across the Web or for handy storage purposes – is pretty easy, too. Surely one of the most fiendishly simple, and eminently useful, desktop utilities ever created...

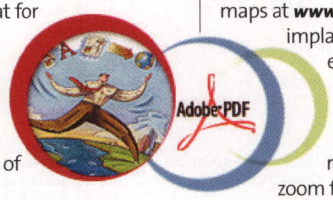
10 PDF READER

Acrobat Reader

www.adobe.com

View PDF documents such as brochures and maps simply

Adobe's PDF format has been a revelation – a universal format for document exchange. In order to create PDF files you need to buy a rather hefty bit of software from Adobe called Adobe Acrobat. But Adobe have carefully thought this out – what if other people want to be able to read the documents? That's where the Acrobat Reader software comes in. If you have a PDF document on a disk you'll be able to read that using the software, free to download from the Adobe Web site. Adobe has also created a plug-in for users downloading PDF files from the Web. It's all part of the same download.



When you open a PDF file on the Web in your browser, such as the maps at ***www.thetube.com***, it is implanted within the browser window. The plug-in is just as powerful as Acrobat reader itself – you can even print, rotate, crop, save and zoom from within this window. Many user manuals are now provided in PDF format, so it's very likely that you'll come across PDFs in one form or another at some stage: arm yourself with Acrobat and you'll never be left wondering how to open them again.

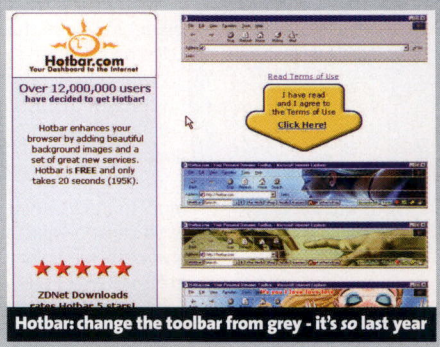
USEFUL ADD-ONS FOR THE WORLD'S FAVOURITE BROWSER

MAKE EXPLORER WORK HARDER >>

As well as the software and plug-ins such as Shockwave and AI RoboForm that made our top 20, there are plenty of other add-ons and plug-ins available for IE which make Explorer an even sleeker browsing experience.

One of the most interesting is Hotbar (***www.hotbar.com***). The program lets you choose from a variety of Web-based 'skins' for your Internet Explorer toolbar. You can change the default grey to virtually anything you want from a picture of a shoal of fish to bizarre fluorescent patterns. After all, there are 57,000 to choose from.

If you don't fancy changing a few things about your exisiting copy of IE, try downloading a new variation on the same theme. NeoPlanet (***www.neoplanet.com***) is a completely new browser based on the IE model (that means you'll need to have IE to run it). It's based on channels, designed to give you easy access to your favourite sites. You can completely change the look of the browser. There's also a box for rolling headlines.



Hotbar: change the toolbar from grey - it's *so* last year

NetCaptor is more of the same (***www.netcaptor.com***). It uses a 'tabbed' interface similar to that of Opera, and it'll give you Opera's level of flexibility, but with the useability of IE. Enhancements to IE are possible because of something called Web Accessories: it's an 'extensibility feature' according to the company, which has made plenty of information about the technology available from ***www.microsoft.com/windows/ie/webaccess***.

FourTimes (***members.tripod.com/~fourtimes***) is an application that allows you to navigate four Web pages within the same window. Again, it's basically an adapted browser using the IE engine but it includes a built-in search engine and alerts you when new email arrives. By far the best feature is the ability to turn off pop-up ads.

OTHER ESSENTIAL DOWNLOADS

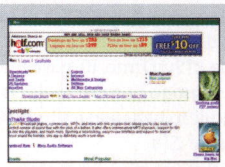
THE BEST OF THE REST »

	TYPE	NAME	WHAT DOES IT DO?	URL
	11 Firewall Software	ZoneAlarm	Ideal protection for your Net connection	www.zonealarm.com

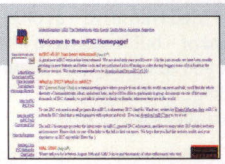
ZoneAlarm is a firewall for your PC and will regulate what traffic comes in and out of your Internet connection. You can even control which applications have access to the Internet. It's ideal for those who use a PC on a network or other always-on connection. There's also a Pro version of the software available for $39.95 (around £28).

	12 HTML Editor	CoffeeCup	Edits HTML pages in a jiffy	www.coffeecup.com

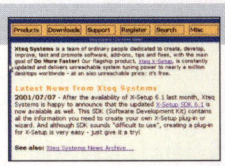
Now on version 8.9, the powerful Shareware CoffeeCup HTML Editor features a split-screen display and provides an easy way to take control of HTML. The download includes Expresso FTP for uploading and downloading files to your site. A more advanced version of the software is available for $49.99 (around £35).

	13 FTP Software	FTP Explorer	Uploads files to your Web site	www.download.com

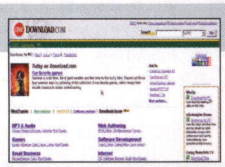
This application works in a very similar way to the Windows Explorer in later versions of Windows. This means it's extremely easy to use and doesn't require much prior knowledge; you can easily just drag and drop files between the server and your machine. It's not the best FTP software around, but it's free.

	14 IRC Client	mIRC	Gets you into Internet Relay Chat	www.mirc.com

mIRC is an Internet Relay Chat client. It is reminiscent of chatting in a 1980s science fiction film, but millions of users enjoy the system worldwide. For more information visit **www.irchelp.org** or look at the **alt.irc** newsgroup.

	15 System Tweaks	X-Setup	Gets behind Windows	www.xteq.com

A useful little utility, Xteq X-Setup is a 'tweaker' program. This allows you to get behind the Windows interface and customise features you wouldn't usually be able to. There's over 750 different tweaks you can perform from the Explorer-like interface including many alterations to the operation of Windows and Internet Explorer.

	16 PC Update	CNET CatchUp	Keeps your machine up-to-date	www.download.com

CNET is the business behind mega download portal **www.download.com**. This software scans your computer to see if it needs updating and provides you with a list of recommended updates. Never again will you be faced with messages saying your drivers and plug-ins are out of date.

	17 Picture Viewer	Eagle Vision	Opens all the pictures you want	www.download.com

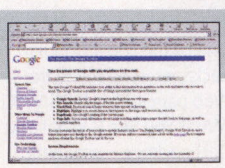
Eagle Vision 2002 is an image viewer which supports a whole host of popular picture formats. It enables you to print and create slide shows of images as well as change and stretch picture sizes before you print them. It's not an image editor, but it will certainly make sure you can actually view the many pictures you get in your email.

	18 Search software	WebFerret	Gets to grips with searching on the Net	www.zdnet.com/ferret

WebFerret really makes sure you find what you want on the Web. It'll let you search a variety of popular search engines in one fell swoop, either by keyword, phrase or alternatively using Boolean terms. Web Ferret will even filter out bad language or pornography, so it's good for kids, too. The results list can also be re-sorted.

	19 Anti-virus software	AVG Anti-Virus	Keeps your machine virus free... for free	www.grisoft.com

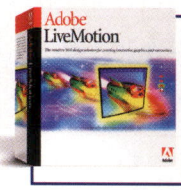
With this application you'll get an email scanner as well as the ability to schedule virus checks. Unusually for free virus checkers, there are also free updates available on a monthly basis which you can set to automatically update your software when you connect to the Internet. It also includes a shield which sits on your desktop.

	20 Search aid	Google Toolbar	Performs Google searches without going to Google	www.google.com

Google's toolbar is probably one of the best add-ons for Internet Explorer that we've ever seen – just type your search term in and off it goes. It'll also search newsgroups and there's even an 'I'm feeling lucky' feature to go straight to the first search result. You can hide buttons and completely customise the bar, so you won't be faced with a lot of oddball features.

Q&A

Confused by computers? Intrigued by the Internet? Our team of Net experts have the answers at the ready

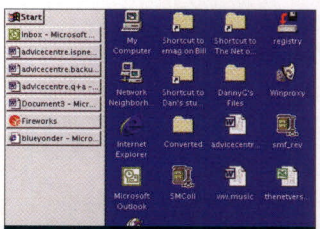


The sender of the Good Question wins Adobe GoLive Web authoring software, worth £280

TOOLBAR BLUES

Somehow my toolbar has moved to the left hand side of my monitor. I can't seem to get it back to the bottom. How can I sort this out?
NIGEL WORDLEY, VIA EMAIL

The solution to this problem is easier than you think. All you need to do is drag the bar back to the bottom of the screen with your mouse. Press and hold on the bar, then move the mouse to the bottom of the screen and to the right slightly. You will see a box shape appear over the bottom of the screen. The idea is that the bar can be moved to whichever edge of the screen you want. If a user normally uses a Macintosh, then it's handy to be able to move the bar to the top of the screen, where it's found on most Macs.



Where do you want tools to go today?

MOBILE ALERT

I decided to sign up with MSN Hotmail (*www.hotmail.com*) to take advantage of the mobile phone alert system for received emails. After spending several hours trying to sort this out, it would appear the service only applies to US residents with a US cell phone. So I tried Yahoo!, only to get the same results.
NICK FULFORD, VIA EMAIL

Yes it's true, Hotmail doesn't support Alert in the UK. The last we heard, Microsoft was planning such a service. As for Yahoo!, you must have gone to the US site (***www.yahoo.com*** rather than ***uk.yahoo.com***) – there *is* a service at ***uk.mobile.yahoo.com***. Another good tip might be to sign up for one of the major mobile portals, Genie (***www.genie.co.uk***), Vizzavi (***www.vizzavi.co.uk***), Orange (***www.orange.net***) or VirginXtras (***www.vxtras.com***). Some of these services, such as Genie, broadly support all phones whereas Orange and VirginXtras only support their parent companies' phones. These sites will allow you to get text alerts on your phone as well as being able to receive email while you're on the move. And if you've got WAP, you'll be able to reply to them properly.

Subscribe to HomeTime for free internet calls

£8.99

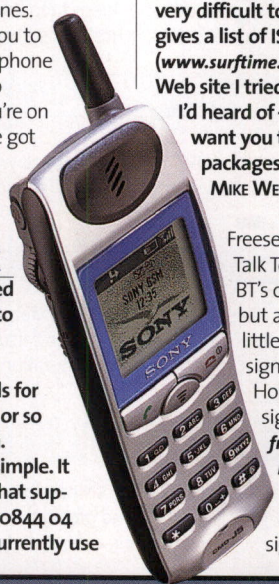
There are three basic steps involved in signing up, but it will take a few minutes. Just seven days after you've completed these three steps, you can start benefiting from your free evening and weekend Internet calls.

- **Step 1** - Join Freeserve and become a Freeserve member.
  - Already got a Freeserve email address and password? Proceed to step 2.
  - If not, join Freeserve now, then return to this page with your new email address and password.
- **Step 2** - Sign up to a BT Internet call package

Freeserve HomeTime: fully supports the BT Talk Together package

IT WOULD BE GOOD TO TALK

The other day I switched from BT Talk Together to BT SurfTime, thinking I could surf the Net at evenings and weekends for 'free' – or rather the £5 or so they charge per month. However, it's not that simple. It appears I need an ISP that supports SurfTime and an 0844 04 number from them. I currently use WHSmith powered by BTClick as my ISP but it doesn't appear to allow you to use BTSurfTime. BT gave me an 0800 1691040 number which is very difficult to hear and a site that gives a list of ISPs (*www.surftime.bt.com*). From the Web site I tried Freeserve – as one I'd heard of – but it seems to want you to sign up for its own packages. What gives?
MIKE WESTBURY, VIA EMAIL



Freeserve does support BT Talk Together (as well as BT's other Surf packages) but as you rightly say, it's a little ambiguous how you sign up for it. Freeserve's HomeTime package – sign up at ***www.freeserve.com/time/hometime*** – does support the BT package. Indeed, everyone who signs up to HomeTime

GLOSSARY » Terms and phrases to keep you in the know

ADSL
High-speed broadband Internet, otherwise known as broadband. In case you're wondering, ADSL stands for Asymmetric (or Asynchronous) Digital Subscriber Line. Just to confuse things slightly, in the US, it's often referred to as DSL.

APPLET
A program written in the Java language and included as an integral part of a Web page. If you see things floating across the screen, it's likely there's a Java applet involved, although don't confuse it with Flash. Also not to be confused with JavaScript, which is not the same thing.

BANDWIDTH
If you had a water pipe, you would talk about its capacity and its diameter; bandwidth means the same but for an Internet connection.

BROADBAND
The term for high speed Internet access currently being offered by many ISPs. For more information and news on Broadband visit ***www.broadband-news.co.uk***.

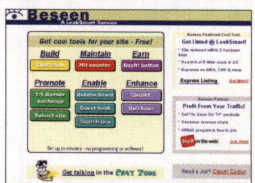
BROWSER
A software program used to look at Web pages and other Internet resources written in HTML. The most popular browsers are Internet Explorer (***www.microsoft.com/windows/ie***) Netscape (***www.netscape.co.uk***) and the less well-known but extremely useable Opera (***www.opera.com***).

CGI
Standing for Common Gateway Interface, CGI is the standard set of rules that dictate how data is collected by a Web server. Forms are the most common use for these, and the Web page will use a 'CGI script' to send the information back to the Web server.

CHAT ROOM
A chat room is a section of an Internet site where people can 'meet' and chat – i.e. exchange emailed messages – in real time through their browser. Not to be confused with newsgroups, which post out information. You can set your own chat room up by using a site such as ***www.beseen.com***.

COOKIE
A cookie is a file that left on your computer by a Web site. This file contains information about your visit and information you might have left on the site, possibly even including your username and password.

CYBERSPACE
A term originally conceived in William Gibson's book *Neuromancer*, it is now as a general term for the Internet or, more specifically, the virtual 'space' in which information is moved between computers.



Beseen: but not heard

DOMAIN NAME
The name that points to a site on the Internet. The domain is everything after the www in a Web address. Examples include ***bbc.co.uk*** and ***microsoft.com***.

DREAMWEAVER
One of the most popular packages used to create Web pages. It's a WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) package – meaning that instead of writing

must have a BT package. So that's either BT Surf Together, BT Surf & Talk Together or BT SurfTime. It sounds complicated but it isn't – it just means there are two sign-up processes. And selecting an ISP from the list at the bottom of ***www.surftime.bt.com*** will usually take you straight to the ISP's sign-up page. Remember that you can use any of them; BT's page advises you to 'choose the best ISP package for your access needs' – which doesn't necessarily mean a name you recognise immediately.

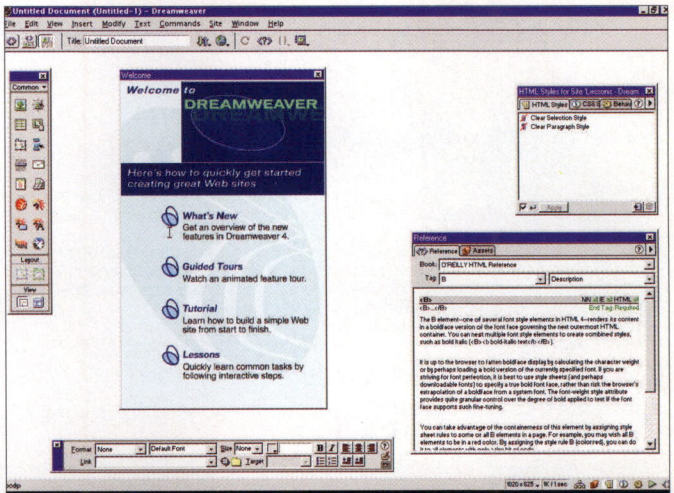
RECENTLY VISITED SITES

I am using Internet Explorer 5 and am very new to the Net and would like to know if it's possible to delete the list of Search Engines. When I click on the small arrow to the right of the box where you type the address, all the Search Engines that I've previously visited are listed. I can't seem to highlight them and delete them. If it's in any way possible to do so can you please tell me what steps to take.
J CROFT, VIA EMAIL

You can't actually 'delete' this list of search engines and in fact, it will be a list of all the sites you have recently visited in Internet Explorer. This is so you can easily re-access them if you want to. The list isn't taking up any memory on your computer and it would be a rather fruitless exercise to delete them anyway, as when you visit another site it will show up there, too.

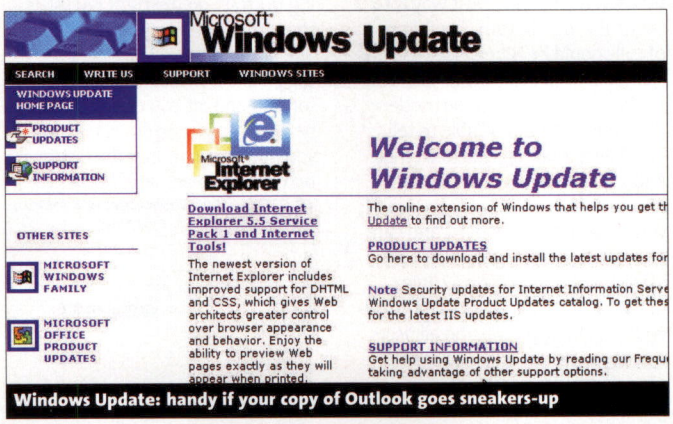
WEB PAGE EDITORS

I have been asked if I can build a simple Web site for my local church. I have looked on Webmonkey (*hotwired.lycos.com/webmonkey*) and got a little confused. I can do basic HTML and have used FrontPage but what I would like to know is what the best Web building program is. Also can you advise me on any URLs or books that are available to help me get started?
MARTIN GILES, VIA EMAIL



Dreamweaver: lets you create Web pages with or without HTML knowhow

Webmonkey is a great resource, but try HTML Help at ***www.htmlhelp.com***. This is a huge searchable database which you'll probably find quite use- »



Windows Update: handy if your copy of Outlook goes sneakers-up

Q&A GOOD QUESTION

OUTLOOK: DESPERATE

My Outlook Express 5 no longer works. The program was set up with a Freeserve account back and has been perfect for years. Just recently it has developed a problem. It tries to send and collect but says there is an error and doesn't send, though it will collect. Sometimes it refuses to let me into Sent Items. If I close the program it usually works. I would like to re-install Outlook but want to keep the sent and received items. How can I do this and reload Outlook Express?
PHILLIP PEARCE, VIA EMAIL

Reinstall Outlook from a Freeserve CD (try your local Dixons), which will upgrade your software at the same time, or download a new version from ***windowsupdate.microsoft.com***. Upgrading will update your email and other information. Don't uninstall Outlook Express from your computer first as this might mean you do lose your mail. Check out our feature on backing up your Internet settings and email, starting on p106.

TERM OF THE MONTH FAQ

An FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) document contains just that – a selection of the most common questions on individual topics. Many companies (including almost all ISPs) use them so their customers or users don't have to contact them with simple queries. Microsoft even has them about its software (see *www.microsoft.com/office/faq.htm*). Many newsgroups also have them so subscribers don't get lots of posts all asking the same simplistic questions. You can visit the FAQs archive at *www.faqs.org*.

things in code, it enables you to write and format text as well as create tables for a Web page just as you would in, say, Microsoft Word.

EMAIL

Electronic mails are messages sent from one Internet user to another through an email account. Often, the second part of an email address (after the '@') will be a domain name, but an email address is not to be confused with a URL.

FIREWALL

If you use a network at work to access the Internet, your company may have a firewall blocking access to certain sites or file types. This reduces the threat from viruses and other unwanted downloads. Individual users can also get hold of firewall software.

FIREWORKS

One of the most popular packages made specifically for the purpose of creating pictures for the Internet, usually in the form of .gif or .jpg files.

FLASH

Flash has become one of the most popular ways to create moving graphical images on the Web. The benefit is that the file sizes are very small, so they download quickly even over a 56Kb modem.

FRONTPAGE

Another of the most popular packages for creating Web pages, principally because FrontPage has long been part of Microsoft's Office suite – until now (see p116 for an Office XP review).

FTP

File Transfer Protocol is the way in which files are uploaded and downloaded to and from Web sites using an FTP Client such as WS_FTP. For more details, see ***www.ipswitch.com***.

GIF

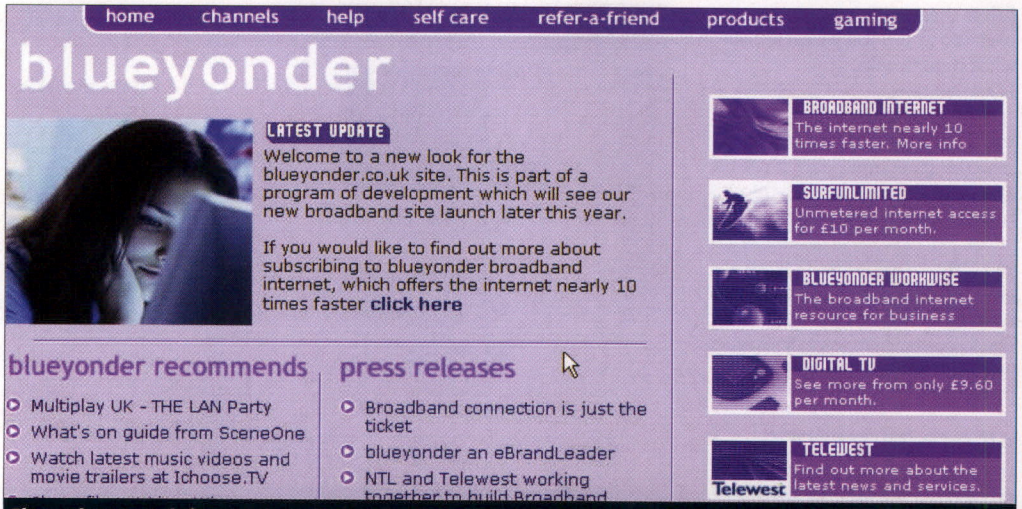
One of the two main formats for images on the Web, the second being .jpg. Gifs are used for flatter graphics such as logos.

GOLIVE

Another popular package for creating Web pages. See ***www.adobe.com/products/golive***, or get it free by sending in a Good Question to Q&A (see opposite page).

HIT

A hit is the number of files downloaded from a Web server. The number of hits is often misunderstood; if one person visits a site and downloads a page with 10 pictures on it, this translates as 11 hits (including one for the HTML page). Even Flash files will count. If the user clicks on Refresh, another 11 hits will register. Thus the measurement of a hit is very misleading, and it's why many sites now refer to the number of their visitors in terms of 'unique users'. »



Blueyonder: one reader's connection to the broadband provider has the annoying habit of disappearing into the blue yonder

ful. However, the idea with all modern Web page authoring software – such as FrontPage – is that you shouldn't need to learn HTML. That doesn't necessarily mean you shouldn't want to learn HTML, as it's a very useful skill to have. What's more, if you want to carry out some tweaks you'll know what all that coded stuff actually does mean. Both FrontPage and Macromedia Dreamweaver (***www.macromedia.com/software/dreamweaver***) will let you edit HTML within the package, too, as will the other WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) page editors available. Dreamweaver is often regarded as the daddy of WYSIWYG editors, although FrontPage, because of its similarity to Word, is a great way to start. Another disadvantage with FrontPage is the rather hefty price tag of over £250. If you're looking at learning a new package, there's no substitute for buying a decent book: the bestselling In Easy Steps (***www.ineasysteps.com***) and Dummies (***www.dummies.com***) books cover most popular packages.

DISAPPEARING INTO THE BLUEYONDER

I currently use Telewest Blueyonder for my Internet access but I am not very happy with the service. I pay £19 per month which covers my telephone line rental and unlimited surfing with Blueyonder. The problem is that the line keeps disconnecting every 10 minutes or so. Are there any other ISPs which offer similar deals to the one Blueyonder currently offers? The sad truth is I can't afford to pay big phone bills every month.

JIM BLACKHURST, VIA EMAIL

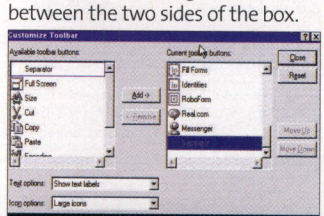
The problem could have several factors behind it, so the best way is to tackle them all in turn. The first port of call should be Blueyonder itself, as it could be a problem with your connection or even your cable modem. Blueyonder should be able to tell you if all is working well from their end. Cable modem performance also depends when and how much you are using the modem, and can also be affected by geographical location. This is because a cable network will allocate a slice of bandwidth for Internet use and all users will have to share this – so when many people are online, the pipe gets a little bit clogged. This still doesn't explain, however, why you have been cut off. Sadly, the best we can suggest is that you get on the blower to Blueyonder.

PASTE IN HASTE

I run a fanzine and do a lot of cut and pasting from Web sites and Web-based discussion boards. Every time I want to do this, I have to go into the edit menu and click 'cut' and 'paste'. I know I can use the keyboard shortcuts but I generally prefer to do things with the mouse. One of my friends has cut and paste on the toolbar of Explorer, but neither he nor I can work out how he got it there. Is there an easy way that I can get icons onto my toolbar?

JENNY GREEN, VIA EMAIL

Putting extra icons onto your toolbar is quite an easy process. On the View menu, go to Toolbars and then Customize. This will take you to a dialogue box with two sides. On the left is a list of the available remaining buttons, on the right is a list of the buttons currently on the Toolbar. The dialogue box also allows you to toggle the text labels for the buttons on and off. You can also choose between large and small buttons. All you need to do is drag the buttons between the two sides of the box.



Toolbars: not as tricky as they look

GLOSSARY » continued

HOME PAGE
Most often used to mean the page which is shown when your browser starts up. This can be changed by going to Internet Options in Internet Explorer's Tools menu or in Netscape's Preferences.

HTML
Standing for HyperText Markup Language, HTML is the code behind a Web page. It's simpler than you'd think and consists of just a few codes which are written in plain text. A browser is required for the files to be interpreted.

HTTP
HyperText Transfer Protocol – the method used to move HTML files across the Internet. As with HTML, a browser is required.

HYPERLINK
A link on a Web page which, when clicked, takes you to another page. This is determined by a command in HTML.

TERM OF THE MONTH: PLUG-IN
A plug-in is a small add-on piece of software that adds extra functionality to a large application. Internet Explorer and Netscape use plug-ins to look at several types of file. They extend the useability of your browser. Perhaps the most commonly used is the Shockwave plug-in, which includes the Flash player and has to be added to your browser before you can view pages with Flash content. Get the plug-in from ***www.macromedia.com/shockwave***. RealPlayer (***www.real.com***), QuickTime (***www.apple.com/quicktime***) and AcrobatReader (***www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep.html***) are examples of other types of plug-in which you may find useful.

IMHO
Used while chatting, IMHO simply stands for In My Humble Opinion.

INTERNET EXPLORER
The most popular browser in the world, mainly because it's included with virtually every PC at the point of purchase thanks to Mircosoft's ominpresence. But you can't quibble with the quality – it's the best browser going, shading Netscape's efforts. And it's available free from ***www.microsoft.com/windows/ie/download***.

INTRANET
A network inside a company that is closed to the outside world, but that is able to be viewed by members of that company in the same way as they would view an external Internet page.

ISP
An Internet Service Provider is an organisation that allows you access to the Internet. See p110 for an independent assessment.

JAVASCRIPT
A language used in Web pages to introduce interactivity in the form of 'scripts'. It was invented by Netscape and, despite the name, bears no relation to the Java programming language used to make Applets. See ***www.javascript.com*** for more information and downloadable scripts for you to use.

JPEG
One of the two main formats for producing images on the Web, the other being Gif. Jpegs (suffix .jpg) are used for photos and more complex Web graphics.

MAILING LIST
A system whereby someone can send an email to a data-

COME AND MEET US

Want to meet *the net*'s team of experts in the flesh? Then come to Live 2001, the UK's biggest and best consumer electronics show. It hits the Birmingham NEC from 21-23 September, so put the date in your diary now – or you could always visit the show's site at *www.livexpo.co.uk*.

You'll find cut and paste functions there, along with other standard IE features. You might also notice that any plug-ins you have installed will have installed their buttons, too.

HANGING ON THE TELEPHONE

I have problems with call waiting when I connect to the Internet. Is there any way I can make sure it doesn't come on and cut me off, as it can be extremely annoying?
PAUL KIDD, VIA EMAIL

Your telecoms provider will be able to give you a code to disable call waiting. With BT phone lines you can turn it off by dialling #43#. Just as you can tell your computer to dial an outside line, you can also tell it to disable the call waiting for you. In the Telephony settings of your Control Panel, under the 'My Locations' tab, you'll find a 'To disable call waiting...' feature. Turn this on using the check box and then type the relevant call waiting code – like #43# – into the box. Call waiting will then be automatically disabled whenever you go online.

MP3 ON iTV?

I've just bought a brand spanking new Interactive TV (iTV) set-up from Bush (*www.bushinternet.com*), as featured in your September issue. and I've been accessing the Net through the service. However, I'd also like to download some MP3s using the service. Is this possible, and if so, what do I need to be able to do it? At the moment I'm not sure if it's just a case of getting new software installed on my iTV.
ANDREW PARSONS, VIA EMAIL

As it stands, using the Internet through iTV is a lot different from using it on a computer. Through iTV you are simply able to browse the Web, not download things from it. This is mainly because ,unlike a desktop computer, your television has no storage space or hard drive. This also means you can't download or install software. More to the point, neither does an iTV have an operating system which can handle files (such as Windows or Mac OS). This isn't to denigrate the iTV, which is an incredibly user-friendly way to surf while sitting comfortably. But then if iTVs did have these capabilities, they would cost a whole lot more... and they'd be called computers.

CONTENT WARNINGS

Every time I log onto the Web my computer tells me to check my content. I am then directed to the Internet Properties content settings, which always reset themselves to zero. I then have to set them back up to four on the settings. Then to make my life a living misery, every time I go from page to page I have to authorize it and type in my password. How can I sort this out, as it's driving me mad?
PHILIP NICHOLLS, VIA EMAIL

It is likely that there's a simple answer to your problem. Maybe something you're trying to access (probably your home page) doesn't have a content rating, and so it's causing your browser to reject the site. Try changing your home page to see if that helps. Your main problem is likely to be your computer's sensitivity, caused by your relatively high content setting of four. If you leave the setting at zero, this will solve the problem caused by this page and should ensure problem-free browsing in future.

base of Internet users that have signed up with their service. Often, people can reply to the list with their own thoughts. In turn, that email is sent to all the users on the database.

MODEM

Shortened from MOdulator/DEModulator. This is the device, often inside your computer (but sometimes external), that allows you to connect to the Internet.

NETIQUETTE

Quite simply, the etiquette of the Internet. Examples include: don't post to a newsgroup in HTML; don't send loads of emails selling things (which is too close to spam for etiquette comfort).

NETIZEN

Hurriedly derived from the word citizen to describe the new generation of Net-savvy people, a Netizen is simply a user of the Internet, or someone who uses networked resources.

Yahoo!: one of the most popular portals in the world

NET-SAVVY

Someone who uses and is familiar with the Internet and what it can do.

NETSCAPE

Now part of AOL/Time Warner, Netscape is the company that invented what is now the world's second most popular browser. You can download it free from ***www.netscape.co.uk***.

NEWSGROUP

The name for discussion groups on the Internet, not to be confused with chat rooms. All the newsgroups on the Internet are sometimes lumped together and referred to as 'Usenet'.

PORTAL

A large multi-purpose site intended to be the first point of entry to the Web such as ***www.msn.co.uk*** or ***www.yahoo.co.uk***.

SPAM

Spamming is the delivery of a large amount of unsolicited email or newsgroup postings. Very annoying.

URL

Meaning Uniform Resource Locator, a URL is the entire address of an Internet resource such as ***http://www.bbc.co.uk*** or ***alt.fan.madonna***.

WWW

The World Wide Web consists of a collection of resources that work using – among other things – Usenet and WAIS, in addition to the HTTP protocol that allows browsers to view HTML pages and the files associated with them. The Internet itself also includes newsgroups and FTP servers.

INTERNET TOOLS & TIPS

powered by freeserve
www.freeserve.com

Making the most of the Web with Freeserve

OCTOBER 2001 | HANDHELD 102 | EMAIL ACCESS 104 | ONLINE HELP 104 | INSTALLING FREESERVE 104

Handheld www.freeserve.com/handheld

Your life in your hands

The new Freeserve Handheld zone will make your PDA completely indispensable

Gone are the days of heavy, awkward Filofaxes, bulging at the seams with appointments, notes, bits and bobs – personal organisers that ended up making us feel more confused and overwhelmed than organised. Now, more and more people are spending a little extra on a personal digital assistant (PDA), or handheld, a palm-sized computer that holds your calendar, to-do list and address book and displays the information you want on a neat little screen.

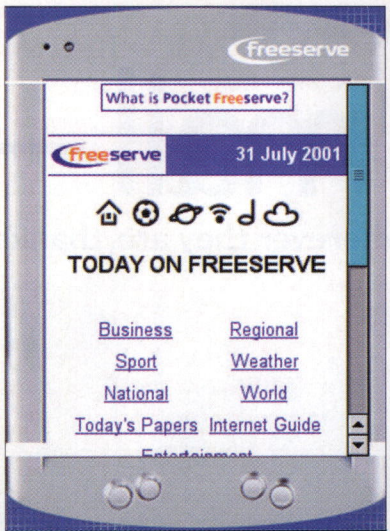
Anyone who uses one will know how much quicker and easier it is to access this kind of information with a handheld than it ever was with a Filofax – no more rummaging through the pages, trying to decipher squashed handwriting and amended arrangements, or trying catch those extra notes as they fall onto the floor. With a handheld you need only press a few buttons or touch a couple of icons and the information you want immediately pops up in front of you.

But while the calendar, to-do list and address book on your handheld already make it a very useful device to have, it can do much more than you might realise. With the help of the brand-new Handheld Zone at ***www.freeserve.com/handheld***, you can have even more freedom and access to even more information, all in the palm of your hand. You might think that sounds like it's going to be complicated, and technically it is. But the information and instructions at Handheld are written clearly and simply so that anyone will quickly be able to make their PDA indispensable.

Freeserve supports the majority of handhelds, including Palm, Psion and Sony, Pocket PC and Handspring; you can find out whether yours is covered by viewing Supported Handhelds. The first thing you'll then want to do is get your PDA connected to Freeserve. For every model covered, you'll find an idiot-proof step-by-step guide showing you how this is done, using either a landline telephone connection – as you would with your PC – or a mobile. If your mobile has infra-red it can communicate with your handheld without any cables; if it doesn't, you'll just need a mobile cable modem to connect the two.

Getting connected to Freeserve gives you access to the Internet, and that means access to your email wherever you are, whether you plug in via a landline or use your mobile. Once you're set up, you'll be able to use your Freeserve email account with as much freedom as you

Kit out your handheld at Freeserve



Pocket Freeserve: perfect for PDAs

would from your PC. You'll be able to read whole emails, reply to them, forward them and delete them, so you'll never need to miss any urgent correspondence. You can even receive and send SMS messages with your handheld.

Being connected to the Internet to access your email means you'll also have access to the World Wide Web itself. Although you'll be able to view the same version of the Web as you see on your PC, on your handheld's much smaller screen it may be harder to read and to navigate. Much handier is Pocket Freeserve, a version of the content at Freeserve specially designed and edited for handhelds, allowing for fast downloads from the Internet. This text-based version brings you the latest on sport, entertainment, regional and world news, the weather and your horoscope. There's a regularly updated Internet Guide, too.

You might think that your handheld comes with a good enough range of applications, but that's nothing compared to the selection that you'll be able to download to it from Freeserve Handheld. You can do this by synchronising your handheld with your PC – there's a step-by-step guide showing you how to do this – so that once you've downloaded the applications from Handheld to your PC, you can pick them up on your PDA. You'll be able to significantly expand your handheld's capabilities by downloading games, database applications, time management tools, language guides, travel guides, maps and all-important virus protection. You'll find clear instructions at every step.

In the near future you'll also be able to download multi-media players so that you can watch videos, cartoons and movie trailers on your handheld, listen to recordings and the radio, and even load and read books on it. And if your handheld has infra-red, you can 'beam' your favourite software downloads to another similar handheld nearby. That way, you can share your new applications with friends who have handhelds too.

No need to scrabble with paper maps; just download one to your handheld

Synchronising your handheld with your PC also allows you to have a duplicate version of your larger machine's contacts list and calendar, so that when you make changes to the ones on your handheld when you're away from the office, they'll automatically get updated on your PC. Because this works the other way round, too, your handheld will always be up to date whenever you leave your PC, so wherever you are, you'll be on top of things. You'll also be able to copy text and picture files from your PC to your calendar, so you'll be access a design or a map, for example, even if you're miles from your computer.

Expand your handheld's capabilities by downloading software from the Freeserve Handheld Zone

Freeserve Handheld has everything to make your PDA as high-tech as possible, using plain lo-tech English that everyone can understand. To find out more about getting the most from your handheld device, go to the Handheld Zone at *www.freeserve.com/handheld*.

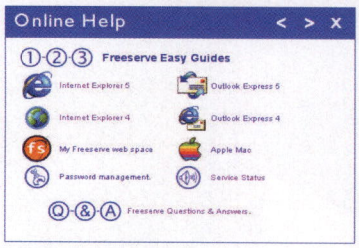
PICTURE: CORBIS

ONLINE HELP

YOUR PROBLEMS SOLVED

FREESERVE ONLINE HELP

If you've got a problem with the Internet or have a question about it, you can get a straight answer, straight away, from Freeserve online Help (www.freeserve.com/help). Read the following summaries of our four main Help sections to find the one that suits your type of query. Then connect to Freeserve and choose Help to have your problem solved.

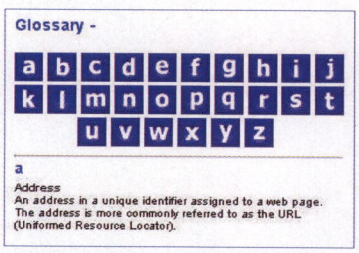


THE GLOSSARY

If there's an Internet expression you don't understand, you'll find it here in plain English.

THE EASY GUIDES

If there's an area of your Internet use that's causing you difficulty, turn to our Easy Guides for a solution.



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

If you've a specific question, go to our Q&A section. Select the general area from our drop-down menu to find a specific question and our answer.

CONTACT

If you still need help, you can email our technical help desk, open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They'll be happy to help. Direct email addresses are listed on the contacts page, or you can call the following:

PC USERS 0906 2517517
MAC USERS 0906 7234000

Calls cost 50p per minute.

Online help
www.freeserve.com/help

Communications www.freeserve.com/communications

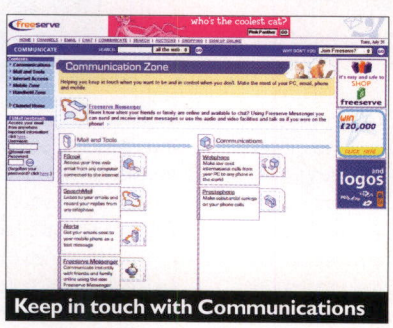
You have mail —

Now anyone can access their email, wherever they are, thanks to

Email: it's been a communications revolution. Who doesn't use it for a significant part of their correspondence? All around the world, anyone with a computer, a modem and a telephone connection will have access to email, enabling them to send written messages to anyone, anywhere, quickly and cheaply. Because they are written, they are a vital method of recording your communications for future reference. Whether you use it throughout the day or you only check it occasionally, email has become a way of life for everyone.

So what do you do if you're away from your PC? Messages will keep arriving in your inbox, but you won't be at your desk to read them. Freeserve have solved that problem with several tools designed to let you access your email wherever you are. For example, if you sign up for Web-based FSmail (at *www.freeserve.com/communications*), you'll be able to access your FSmail account to send, read, reply to or delete your messages from anywhere in the world; all you need is access to a computer connected to the Internet, . FSmail is completely free; all you pay for is the cost of the phone call connecting you to the Internet. And because that's the cost of a local call, it can cost next to nothing.

But what if you don't have access to a computer, either? If you're a Freeserve member, with a normal Freeserve email account as well as FSmail (which you'll have automatically if you are a member), you won't need a computer to access your emails. With a mobile or even an ordinary low-tech landline, you'll be able to get your messages, thanks to Speechmail (*www.freeserve.com/speechmail*). This ingenious device allows you to hear your emails being read to you over the phone by a special electronic voice. It's completely free – you just pay for the call to Speechmail – and very simple to use. When you register to use Speechmail, you'll be given a PIN that you quote whenever you call the special Speechmail telphone number. Once you've heard your message, you can either dictate a reply for up to 60 seconds or choose to delete it. Calling Speechmail from a mobile means you have the freedom to hear your email when you're on the move, too.



Keep in touch with Communications

Speechmail isn't the only way you can get your emails using a standard mobile. There's also Freeserve Alerts. Using your mobile network's SMS service, Freeserve Alerts sends you the first 140 characters of any new messages that arrive in your Freeserve email account for you to read on your mobile's screen. This means you won't miss any urgent messages, while the full message remains in your account for you to read in full, reply to or delete when you make it back to your PC.

If you have a WAP, or mobile Internet phone, you have even more freedom with your email. Because WAP phones can connect to the Internet without any cables, they can also connect to your

anywhere

a range of tools at Communications

Receive your mail wherever you are, no matter how low-tech your facilities

Freeserve email account in the same way, allowing you to read all of your email messages in full, reply to them, forward them, delete them or send new ones, all from the palm of your hand.

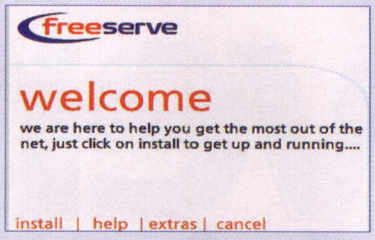
The same goes for handhelds or PDAs (personal digital assistants), which can also access the Internet and your Freeserve email account on the hoof. For more about what else you can do with your handheld,

You don't need a computer to keep up with your email

see the feature on page 102 or go to *www.freeserve.com/handheld*. Freeserve Mobile (*www.freeserve.com/mobile*) will tell you everything you can do with your mobile. With email such an important part of our lives, Freeserve has everything to make sure you never have to be without it. *www.freeserve.com/communications*.

GETTING YOUR PC ONLINE

OUR STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO INSTALLING FREESERVE



1 Insert your Freeserve CD and wait for it to autorun. If it doesn't, go to the start menu and select 'Run', then type D:/setup.exe and click 'OK'.

2 Next, choose 'Install'. The helpful connection wizard will automatically guide you through the right steps to get connected. Click on 'Install Internet Explorer' to continue. If you already have Internet Explorer on your PC, it will now be updated.

3 A licence agreement pops up. Read through it and click 'I Accept' followed by the 'Next' button at the bottom of the box.

4 After selecting the destination folder for Internet Explorer (the installer will automatically create a new folder for it in the Programs folder), you get a choice of how much to install. There's a recommended 'typical' set of components, or you can pick and choose your own – if, say, your hard drive is a bit full. The wizard then takes over and begins the installation process. Sit back and wait to be prompted before moving on to the next step.

5 The wizard will quite possibly optimise your system to get the best possible performance out of it. Let it do so – it knows what it's doing.

6 In just a minute or two, a message appears informing you that installation is complete. Click on the 'OK' button to move on to the next step.

7 Wait for the wizard to automatically configure your PC to run the new version of Internet Explorer. After a few moments, you'll be prompted to restart your PC. Click the 'Finish' button and wait for your PC to automatically restart. If the CD does not autorun, double click on the CD drive icon in Windows to continue.

8 When your computer gets going again, it will update its settings for IE5 and Internet Tools. This is perfectly normal.

9 You're now ready to sign up to your Freeserve account. Make sure your modem is switched on and click 'Continue'. Your modem will then dial into the Freeserve registration computer.

10 You'll be prompted by a security alert confirming your connection. Click 'OK'.

11 A welcome screen provides two options. New members should click on the 'Create New Account' option.

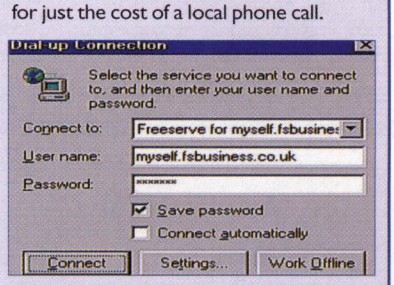
12 Take a couple of minutes to read the terms and conditions, and click 'Accept'. Enter your personal details so your account can be set up. Click 'Continue'.

13 The Help screen explains how your Freeserve email address is constructed. Choose your email address and password and click on 'Continue'.

14 Congratulations. You are now a member of Freeserve. Click on the 'Finished' button when you're ready.

15 When you launch Internet Explorer, it automatically contacts the Freeserve number and sends your username and password to the Freeserve computer (unless you uncheck 'Save password'). This is all you need to log on to the Internet.

16 Once connected, Internet Explorer takes you straight to the Freeserve site. You can now start to explore the Internet for just the cost of a local phone call.



Pick up your Freeserve CD from any Dixons, Currys, PC World or The Link store, or have it sent to you direct by calling 0800 970 8890. It's free.

powered by freeserve www.freeserve.com

PICTURE: CORBIS

Never lose anything again

Losing months of effort is every computer user's worst nightmare – but with a little knowhow, you can make your hard drive crash-proof

IF YOU'VE EVER EXPERIENCED THE ultimate frustration of losing all the information on your computer, you'll know all too well the mixture of hopelessness and despair which follows the realisation that there's no possible way to retrieve the information and work you've lost.

What you might not realise, however, is that fatal crashes are not only rare but also completely avoidable, provided you spend a little time in your daily computer regime putting safeguards in place. But how?

Losing programs is not too much of a disaster. After all, providing you have kept all the installation discs safe, you'll be able to reinstall them quite easily. The only thing you will lose is a hefty chunk of time.

It is important to look after files, but emails and contact details are becoming ever more essential, especially at work. Most of the popular email applications have Import and Export facilities so you can copy mail, addresses, contacts and bookmarks to a backup file on a disk or network.

Import and Export commands are usually found in the File menu of the relevant application, and are generally very easy to negotiate. There's usually a wizard that will take you through the process. It will usually ask what application you're importing from (as you can move email and contacts between programs) as well as where the source file is located.

The problem with backing up email is finding it...

Bookmarks and Favorites (note the American spelling) are the same thing; sites you want to keep in your browser for future access – 'Bookmark' is the Netscape term for them and 'Favorite' the Explorer term.

EMAIL: OUTLOOK AND OUTLOOK EXPRESS

The biggest problem with backing up your email files is finding them, as they're buried deep within the files on your hard disk. And we mean deep – they're hidden in very strange places, often stored separately from the actual program files of your email client.

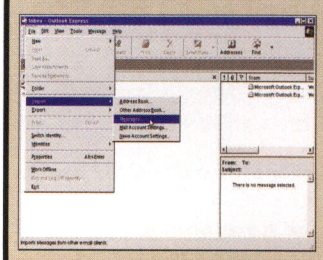
If you're using Outlook on a PC, the procedure is relatively simple. Newer versions of Outlook store all your email, contacts and all the other information that Outlook gathers in one single file, called an Outlook Data File or Personal Folders file. On a PC this has the extension .pst and it is compatible with all the versions of Outlook from 97 on.

The advantage of the Outlook format is that, even if you change jobs, you can move all your Outlook information in one fell swoop. The downside is that the files can be quite big so if you are intending to move your email it's a good idea to delete all your attachments, deleted items folders and sent items as they all take up huge amounts of space. If you have a Zip or other high-capacity storage drive, be prepared to use it.

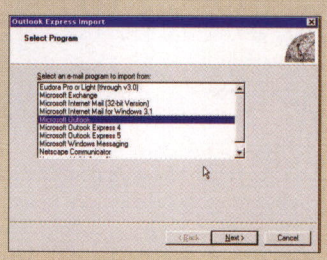
The default .pst file is called Outlook.pst and you can export everything in Outlook via Import and Export as a .pst file or in application-specific formats. When you come to import the data to another program, simply import it in the same way.

This procedure will back up your contacts, but not your address book which is a central Windows application, not part of Outlook. From the Address Book, open the File menu and click on Export. Select Address »

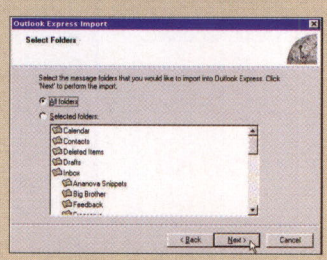
IMPORTING EMAIL IN OUTLOOK EXPRESS



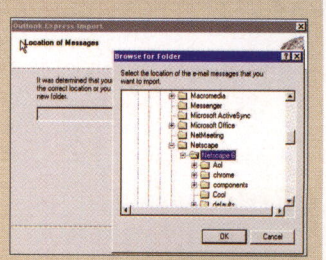
1 Go to Import on the File Menu. The menu allows you to choose from several options: we want to import email from an application on our hard disk, so we choose Messages.



2 We're then taken to a wizard with a list of email programs we can choose to export from. If we import from Outlook elsewhere on our hard disk, Outlook Express will search it for the appropriate files.



3 We're taken to a window where we can select which folders we want to import. You can either select several Outlook folders to import from, or simply select 'All folders' to import all your mail.



4 If you select a different application to import from (other than Outlook), the wizard allows you to browse for the appropriate file on your hard disk – just click Next to import.

Appeal for Assistance

MISSING

The contents of my hard drive: last seen at around 3.30pm on Monday 5th November. It was in the process of completing some really urgent work when its contents simply dissappeared

HAVE YOU SEEN THIS HARD DRIVE? DO YOU KNOW WHERE ITS CONTENTS ARE?

Please contact me on 01984 60070011

All information treated as strictly confidential

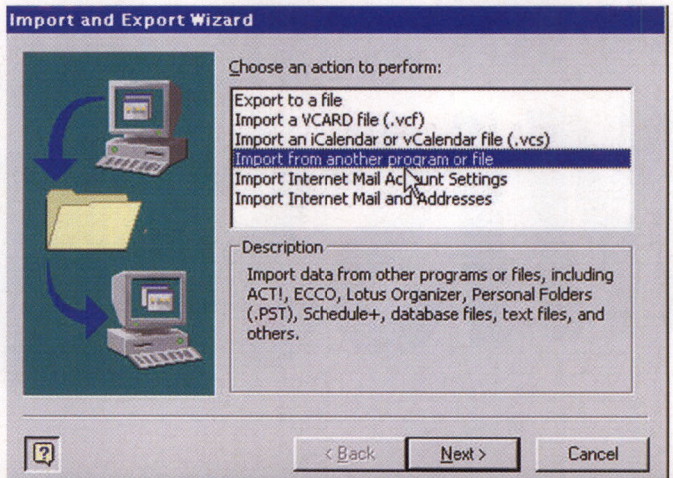
Book (.wab) and save it. Again, you can restore the Address Book using the Import wizard. If you use Outlook Express – the Outlook Express Export wizard will also allow you to back up the Address Book.

Outlook Express also has data files in much the same manner as Outlook. OE data files include the extension .dbx, but unlike the Outlook data files these only include email. Again, you can use the export wizard to backup your mail and the Import wizard to restore it. Outlook Express will have several .dbx files.

On a PC your Outlook and Outlook Express files are located in Windows > Application Data > Outlook (or Outlook Express).

Sometimes the best way to locate the relevant files is to use the Find option on your Windows Start menu and look for files with the relevant extension (e.g. .dbx). You'll need to back up all the .dbx files.

Later versions of Microsoft Outlook on a Mac will only allow you to import and export contacts. The 98 version or anything before it will only let you import contacts, which is irksome. Unfortunately, there seems to be no way around this. However, things are looking up: Outlook 2001 for the Mac is fully import and export compliant. Outlook Express 5 on the Mac will import, but only exports contacts so, again, you'll have to fish for files.



Import and export your mail, account settings and even your addresses in Outlook

When importing your email back onto your computer, you can locate Outlook and Outlook Express source and data files anywhere on your hard disk – we recommend you keep them in your main documents folder. This way, you'll always know where they are and backing them up will be a doddle.

When importing information from a file, remember that with Outlook the file is dynamic; you'll be able to run your email from the .pst file, wherever it is on your hard disk. Outlook needs this data file to function so don't move it once you have chosen to use it. Email Accounts in the Tools menu will also let you select which Outlook Data File you want to use, as you can be using several at the same time.

Outlook Express is different; it imports from the .dbx files you have backed up and then uses the mail information in its own .dbx files. Alternatively, if you know what you're doing, you can replace the new .dbx files on your computer with the ones you have backed up.

EMAIL: NETSCAPE, EUDORA AND OPERA

With Netscape 6 (***www.netscape.com***) Mail, you'll unfortunately have to do your backup the longhand way as it doesn't have an export function. You'll need to find the file on your hard disk – so in Windows, go to Find on Start Menu and locate the file abook.mab on your hard disk. If you need to put your mail back into Netscape at any time, you can do this using the import facility in Netscape Mail. Again, it's located within the File menu – but it might be nice of the people at Netscape to include export next time round.

In Opera Mail (part of the Opera browser from ***www.opera.com***) you can back up your mail, simply by copying the entire Mail directory within Opera. On a PC, this will be located in Program Files on your hard disk and on a Mac you'll (probably) find it in Applications. You can also back up your contacts from Opera, too, by copying the file contacts.adr from the Opera directory. Again, if you can't find it, look for it using the Find option on the Windows Start Menu.

The Windows version of Eudora (***www.eudora.com***) supports direct import of mailboxes and address books from some programs. While Eudora cannot directly import from all email applications, there are many third-party options to help get your old mail and address books into Eudora. Eudora on a PC directly imports Netscape Messenger 4.0x (but not 4.5 or higher) and Outlook

THREE OF THE BEST WAYS TO BACK UP

DRIVES TO SUCCEED >>

If you're backing up all of your email, favourites and connections, a simple disk drive won't hold all of your wares. Invest in a more powerful device and you'll also have the means to back up all your important files and other work. So what are your options for

ZIP

Zip disks are flexible, handy and commonly used. Manufacturer Iomega has just redesigned the disks and drives, which now come with a nice rounded bottom. You can get a 250Mb external drive for around £140-150 (although older, smaller capacity 100Mb versions are available for less.) The newer drives will plug into your PC or Mac and require no external power. Zip disks are also relatively cheap at around £10 each and they're very robust.

CD-REWRITEABLE

CDs have a fairly large capacity of up to 650Mb and in truth, it's probably going to be the cheapest storage format for most users. For just a few pounds you'll be able to buy a stack of them: however, access rates are not exactly quick. There are two types of CD writeable media – CD-R which can only be written once, and CD-RW which can be used time and again. With something dynamic like backing up your email and contacts, you're probably going to be better off using CD-RW media.

JAZ

Another offering from Iomega, Jaz drives cost over £250 but offer superb flexibility – they will hold 2Gb of information per disk (which are about £60 each). Not only will you be able to store all your email and files on one disk, but you'll probably have a fair amount of space for your MP3 collection, too. It's pretty fast to boot and simple to use. Probably the best bet for the business user that needs to backup email from a variety of machines.

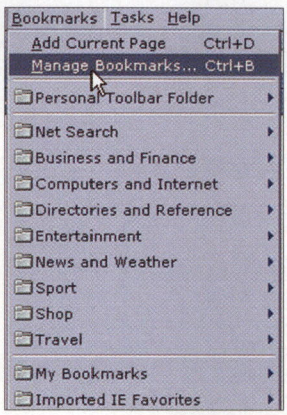
www.iomega.com/europe

98 on, so you'll need to have exported your information from recent software to make it work. Eudora for the Mac is less compliant, only supporting Claris and Outlook Express 5.

FAVORITES AND BOOKMARKS

Your favourites; of all those sites you've visited, you've bookmarked the best. But if you lose all the info on your computer, they'll go, too.

As is the custom, Microsoft Internet Explorer on a PC is easiest to get to grips with and the easiest favourites (sorry, Favorites) to manage.



Officially, the best way to back up your Favorites is to use Import and Export on the File menu of Internet Explorer. It might be the easiest way, but not the most effective. Using this method will just create a simple HTML file. The best way is to access your Favorites through Windows Explorer. Click on your Hard Disk, then the Windows directory. In this vast library of material that makes your computer run, there will be a folder called Favorites. Simply copy this to a disk and all your favourites will be copied. It won't be very big, so should fit on a floppy provided you haven't got too vast an archive.

This method of storing IE Favorites is easiest, since each site appears as a different file. This means you can even order your Favorites into new directories or rename them simply by using Windows Explorer to do it.

If you're moving Favorites from a Mac to a PC you should use the Import/Export method, as Macs deal with Favorites in a single file, like an HTML document.

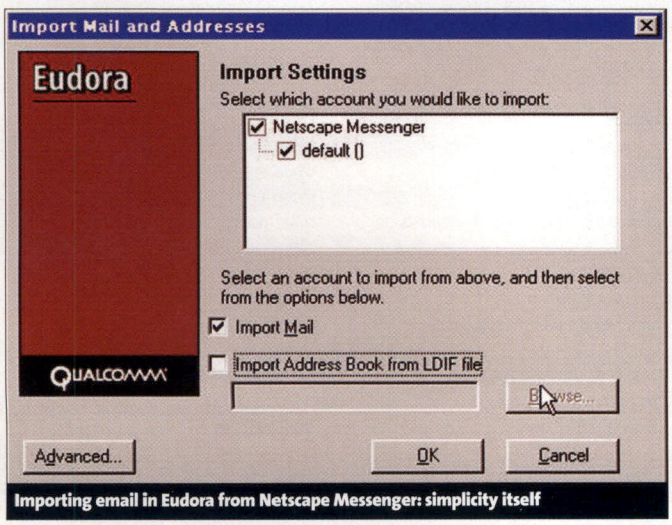
The latest version of Netscape, Netscape 6, improves the way bookmarks are handled. On a PC, go to Manage Bookmarks in the Bookmarks menu. You'll be greeted with a little window, which has a File menu with Import and Export Bookmarks commands. The program imports and exports via HTML files, so if you're moving Favorites from Internet Explorer into Netscape, you'll need to use Export in IE's File menu.

Lose the info on your computer and bookmarks are lost too

CONNECTIONS

On a PC, backing up connections is simple. In My Computer, you'll find a folder called Dial-up Networking. This contains all your different connections.

If you don't manage to save your connection settings, it isn't the end of the world as many ISPs now allow you to download the standard settings from their site – just make sure you remember your username and password. When you register for an ISP, you're asked to open a settings file. One tip (so you keep a copy of the original settings) is to click Save to Disk instead of Open. You'll then have a copy of the settings file. If you do use this method, make sure that you double-click on the file to install the settings, otherwise you won't have them installed on your computer in the first place.



Importing email in Eudora from Netscape Messenger: simplicity itself

SIMPLE STEPS TO IMPROVE YOUR SYSTEM

EASY UPGRADES»

For the purposes of this article, we've covered a range of the most popular and widely used software around:

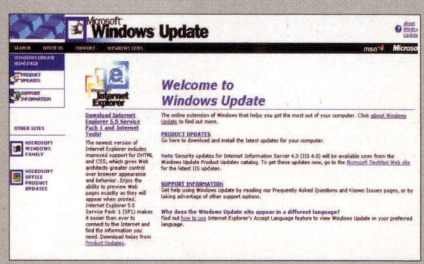
- Outlook 97, 98, 2000 and XP on a PC and Outlook 8 on a Mac.
- Outlook Express 5
- Internet Explorer 5 and Netscape 6
- Netscape Mail 6
- Opera
- Eudora

If you've got an earlier version of either Internet Explorer, Netscape or Outlook Express, then there's no reason not to update it. Newer browser versions are often better to use and there's less possibility of you not being able to see sites because your browser is too old. Remember, too, that Internet Explorer, Netscape, Eudora and Opera are free – so if you fancy an upgrade, here's where to get one.

MICROSOFT WINDOWS UPDATE

windowsupdate.microsoft.com

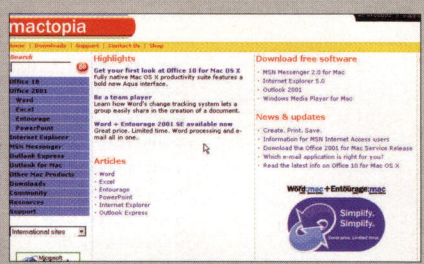
Get all your updates for Windows, Internet Explorer and Outlook Express here – check back for updates.



MICROSOFT MACTOPIA

www.microsoft.com/mac

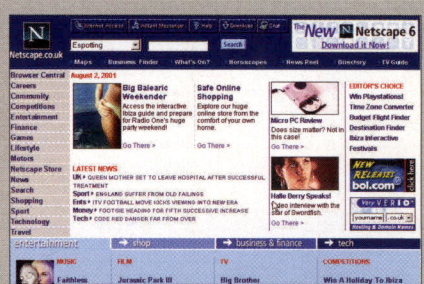
Everything Mr Gates does for the Mac is here, including downloads of IE and Outlook Express as well as other updates for Microsoft software.



NETSCAPE

www.netscape.com/uk/download

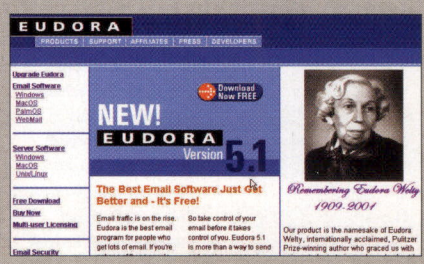
Netscape's UK portal will let you download the latest browser versions as well as sister company AOL's Instant Messenging software.



EUDORA

www.eudora.com

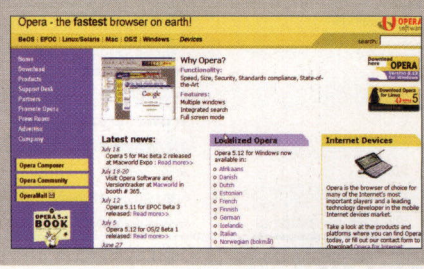
Eudora's site is simple, but that means fans of the easy-to-use email package can download software and updates easily. Mac, PC and Palm are supported.



OPERA

www.opera.com/download

The multi-window browser is now available in a multitude of different languages and formats.



Our top 50 ISPs

October 2001 We tested over 200 UK ISPs to bring you the pick of the bunch

RANK	ISP NAME	WEB ADDRESS	WHAT YOU GET	PHONE	NO. OF EMAIL ADDRESSES
NO MONTHLY SUBSCRIPTION You pay as you go, making these perfect for evenings and weekends					
1	Sniff Out	www.sniffout.net	Features, content and strong technical support	0845 4582356	Unlimited
2	The X-Stream Network	www.x-stream.com	Uses on-screen advertising to offer 0800 dial-up access	0845 8450150	1 Unified
3	Free Internet	www.free-internet.co.uk	Free access, email and Web space	0906 788 0199	1
4	Free Online	www.free-online.net	Straightforward free ISP offering news and email	0845 7058000	5
5	Dabsol	www.dabsol.net	Free ISP with online sign-up help and comprehensive features	0870 703 8567	Unlimited
6	Gateway 2000	www.ukgateway.net	Family-friendly free ISP with shareware and gaming	0906 55 44 400	5
7	Powergen	www.pgen.net	ISP from the energy supply company – gives points off your energy bills	Sign up online	5
8	Luna Internet	www.luna.co.uk	Small ISP offering virtual servers and Internet access. Surftime coming soon	0845 3450175	5
9	Go Free	www.gofree.co.uk	Free ISP offering online sign-up, complete with helpline	Sign up online	Unlimited
10	Breathe	www.breathe.co.uk	Recently went into external administration, but still trading as an ISP	09067 112209	5
11	Freenet	www.freenet.co.uk	Free access with a gaming bias. Online sign-up and newsgroups	08700 722 622	Unlimited
12	Smartone	www.smartone.co.uk	Content-based service offering free dial-ups and incentives for surfing	08700 774411	1
13	Freewire	www.freewire.net	Free ISP without any signup requirements – just dial-up to 0845 088 0088	0906 716 0550	Unlimited
14	F9 Free	www.f9.net.uk	Surftime, ADSL, and free dial-up accounts for the home user	0845 140 0250	Unlimited
15	Callnet	www.callnetuk.com	Innovative free ISP offering enhanced Web-based services	0845 301 1517	5
16	Virgin Net	www.virgin.net	Long-standing ISP now offering a free Internet access service	0500 558800	5
17	Freeserve	www.freeserve.com	Pioneered UK Net access, and now offering a SurfTime package, too	0906 2 517517	Unlimited
18	Tiny Online	www.tinyonline.net	ISP from the PC manufacturer including a beginner's guide to the Internet	0870 010 2471	15
19	UK Online Ltd	www.ukonline.co.uk	A free ISP with family-friendly content and shareware	01749 333333	Unlimited
20	Eisdosnet	www.eidosnet.co.uk	From Eidos, publishers of *Tomb Raider* and other titles	Sign up online	Unlimited
21	Wireplay Internet	www.wireplay.com	Gameplay-owned online games network with access to fast games servers	0845 757 7577	None
22	This is it!	www.thisisit.co.uk	End-user targetted free ISP	0906 9124000	Unlimited
MONTHLY SUBSCRIPTION Flat-fee packages and specialist ISPs; ideal for peak-time surfing					
1	Aviators Network	www.aviators.net	An ISP designed with aircraft-related content for the pilot and the enthusiast	0700 2878776	Unlimited
2	Internet in Nottingham	www.innotts.co.uk	Local midlands provider with a long track record	0115 955 0234	1
3	Paradise Internet	www.pins.co.uk	A subscription provider who also authors software	0706 9903733	1
4	AOL	www.aol.co.uk	A large ISP offering value added services to the home user	0800 3765432	5
5	Compuserve	www.compuserve.com	Long-standing ISP who offer proprietry software	08705 000200	5
6	Which? Online	www.which.net	A free ISP from the consumer affairs magazine of the same name.	08459 830240	1
7	ClaraNET Ltd	www.clara.net	Subscription-based ISP with a range of account options to suit any needs	0845 355 3000	Unlimited
8	Demon Internet	www.demon.net	The UK's original dial-up account	0845 272 0666	Unlimited
BUSINESS ISPs Service providers for small businesses					
1	Firstnet Services Ltd	www.firstnet.co.uk	Wide bandwidth ISP/ASP solutions large and small	0113 292 7777	Unlimited
2	Timewarp Internet	www.timewarp.co.uk	Long-estabilised ISP offering games, ADSL and free email virus checking	0870 757 1159	6
3	Knowall	www.knowall.net	Large ISP attempting to service SMEs and home users with business interests	0207 6101115	1
4	London Web Comms	www.londonweb.net	Business targetted ISP offering a full range of Internet services	0208 3494500	3
5	UUNet	www.uk.uu.net	Range of business solutions and Pipex Dial for single/multi-user accounts	01223 250 100	12
6	NewNet Limited	www.newnet.co.uk	Five years of experience in the industry	0845 355 44 55	1
7	AdeptWeb Ltd	www.adept.co.uk	Full ISP service range and an ASP service for business accounts software	01843 850444	Unlimited
8	GTS Netcom	www.gtsgroup.comnetcom	Tailored business solutions with a focus on customer service	01344 395500	20
9	Nildram	www.nildram.net	Subscription based ISP with a Low User option	01296 319 103	Unlimited
10	Directional Solutions	www.cyberphile.co.uk	Specialists in leased lines, LANs, firewalls, ISDN connections, Intranets etc	01827 310500	1
11	netcib	www.netcib.co.uk	Now responsible for the ISP services of Anglianet and take their place	0870 8003020	1
12	OrbitalNet	www.orbital.net	Impressive range of business services	0800 3891397	5
13	FDD Ltd	www.fdd.co.uk	A Netscalibur company offering IP integration services	01865 321003	1
14	CIX	www.cix.co.uk	Specialise in conferencing and voiceover IP solutions for business	0845 3555050	Unlimited
15	Charis	www.charis.co.uk	Business-focused ISP with a free technical helpline	0870 787 0001	1
16	UKIP	www.ukip.co.uk	Internet consultants offering access and business advice	01772 909 908	1
17	Netscalibur	www.netscalibur.co.uk	Promising pan-European provider taking the place of Dircon	0800 0720000	Unlimited
18	UVNET	www.uv.net	Free ISP offering well-priced support	01753 776699	1
19	Easynet Ltd	www.easynet.net	Subscription-based dial-up service	0845 3334400	Unlimited
20	Datanet International	www.data.net.uk	Business network and interactive site design specialists	01252 810081	Unlimited

KEY **EMAIL ADDRESSES** *The number of free email addresses your ISP will provide.* **CONTENT** *Outlines whether the service provider provides exclusive content.* **MAC SUPPORT** *Not all service providers offer software and tech support for Apple Macs.* **MODEM SUPPORT** *Check your hardware to see whether your ISP can get the best out of your modem.*

Reliability, speed of connection and value for money are the criteria we weigh up to identify the best ISPs and award ratings.

Variation in modem speed
Measures whether you get a constant speed once connected. Each ISP starts with 100 percent and loses points with speed variance.

Variation in time to connect
The reading is taken from the stage between clicking 'Connect' and physical connection.

Availability
Measures how many times an ISP refuses to connect, through the engaged tone or failure to respond correctly to modem signals.

Our ISP testing is carried out by NetBasics, an independent company specialising in providing ISP information for consumers and businesses. NetBasics makes every effort to ensure that the data presented to you here each month is correct.

The publishers of *the net* and NetBasics cannot be held liable for any damages caused by the publication of this data. Any ISP that wishes to be included in the evaluation programme, or wishes to amend or verify details in our tables, should email ***eval@netbasics.com***.

For more information on NetBasics, visit its Web site at ***www.netbasics.com***.

ADDED EXTRAS	MAC SUPPORT	MODEM SUPPORT	SET-UP FEE (£)	MONTHLY CHARGE (£)	PHONE SUPPORT CHARGES	PHONE SUPPORT HOURS		VERDICT: RELIABILITY AND SPEED
None	No	V.90, K56Flex	None	None	National rate	24/7	1	★★★★★
Chat, news, lifestyle, entertainment and Internet news	No	K56flex	None	None	50p per minute	24/7	2	★★★★★
Newsgroups & IE5 download	No	V.90	None	None	Metered	24/7	3	★★★★★
None	Yes	V.90, K56Flex	None	None	Premium rate	24/7	4	★★★★★
None	No	V.90	None	None	Metered	24/7	5	★★★★★
Yahoo! Portal Site	No	V.90	None	None	Metered	24/7	6	★★★★★
None	No	V.90	None	None	50p per minute	24/7	7	★★★★★
None	Yes	V.90	None	None	Local rate	8am-9pm	8	★★★★
None	No	V.90	None	None	Local rate	24/7	9	★★★★
Entertainment, sport, shopping, finance	Yes	V.90, K56Flex	None	None	50p per minute	8am-10pm – 7 days	10	★★★★
Games links and independent status	Yes	K56Flex, X2	None	None	National rate	24/7	11	★★★★
Original portal site with general interest links	Yes	V.90	None	None	Metered	9- 6 Mon-Sat 10- 5 Sun	12	★★★★
None	No	V.90	None	None	50p per minute	24/7	13	★★★★
None	Yes	V.90, K56Flex, X2	None	None	National	8am-9pm	14	★★★
Chat servers, channels, Web news and Web mail	Yes	K56Flex	None	None	Free	8.30am-9pm	15	★★★
Virgin channels including news	Yes	X2	None	None	50p per minute	24/7	16	★★★
Range of channels featuring up-to-date services	No	V.90	None	None	50p per minute	24/7	17	★★★
Search engine, Hotmail, channels, Tiny PC sales	No	V.90	None	None	Local rate	24/7	18	★★★
Comprehensive portal content	Yes	V90	None	None	25p per minute	24/7	19	★★★
Free access to the Mplayer games network.	No	V.90	None	None	50p per minute	24/7	20	★★
Games news, games chat, games add-ons	No	V.90, K56Flex, X2	None	None	50p per minute	12pm-12am	21	★★
None	No	K56Flex	None	None	£1 per minute/via email	24/7	22	★★
Flight info and features for aviators	Yes	V90	10.00	10	Local rate	24/7	1	★★★★★
None	Yes	V90	None	10	Local rate	10am-7pm Mon-Fri	2	★★★★★
None	Yes	V.90, X2	None	8	National rate	7am-11pm	3	★★★★
Massive amount of content within the AOL software	Yes	V.90	None	14.99	Free	8am-midnight	4	★★★★
Portal site with an on-site search engine	No	V.90	None	7.50	National rate	8-12 midnight, 7 days	5	★★★
Online shopping with consumer protection	Yes	K56Flex	None	7.75	£1 per minute	24/7	6	★★★
None	Yes	K56Flex, X2	None	From 4.99	Free	9am-5pm weekdays	7	★★
None	Yes	V.90, K56Flex, X2	None	11.75	Local rate	24/7	8	★★
Search engines and support	No	V.90, K56Flex, X2	None	None	Metered	24/7	1	★★★★★
None	Yes	V90	None	10	Metered	9am-7pm weekdays	2	★★★★★
UK business search and 12 channels	No	K56Flex	None	100 p/a	Standard	9am-9pm	3	★★★★★
None	Yes	K56Flex	15.00	12.50	Standard	9am-9pm Mon-Sat	4	★★★★★
None	No	V.90, K56Flex	Apply	Apply	Call for details	24/7	5	★★★★★
None	Yes	V90	None	10	Local rate	9am-10pm	6	★★★★
None	Yes	V.90, K65Flex	None	100 p/a	Local rate	8:30am-6pm	7	★★★★
None	No	V90	None	14.95	Free	8am-9pm	8	★★★★
None	No	V.90, K56Flex	None	15/30/45	Local rate	9am-9pm	9	★★★★
None	Yes	V.90	None	11.74	Standard rate	8:30am-6pm Mon-Fri	10	★★★★
None	Yes	V.90	None	11.75	Mobile	24/7	11	★★★
None	Yes	V90	None	None	Local rate	9am-9pm	12	★★★
None	Yes	V90	None	22 p/a	Free	9am-5:30pm	13	★★★
None	Yes	V.90	None	14.99	Local rate	9-10 M-F, 12-6 S-S	14	★★★
None	Yes	V90	None	10	Free	9am-5pm	15	★★★
None	Yes	V90	None	125.00 p/a	National rate	6am-6pm	16	★★★
None	Yes	K56Flex, X2	None	11.49	Local rate	9am-9pm	17	★★
None	Yes	V90	None	Various	Local rate	24/7	18	★★
None	Yes	K56Flex	None	11.99	Free	24/7	19	★★
None	Yes	V.90	None	8.57	National rate	24/7	20	★★

SET-UP FEE *Some ISPs charge a fee to open an account.* **MONTHLY CHARGE** *If you don't go with a free ISP, then you'll pay a set monthly fee.* **PHONE SUPPORT CHARGES** *Tech support's great – as long as you're not having to pay a fortune for it.* **PHONE SUPPORT HOURS** *When the tech support desk will be open to take your calls.*

BT: 'install your own ADSL'

Telecoms giant wants to cut waiting lists by letting users set up their systems

BT is planning to let consumers install their own broadband Net access. Unfortunately, it might take until next year for BT to work out how they can let you do it.

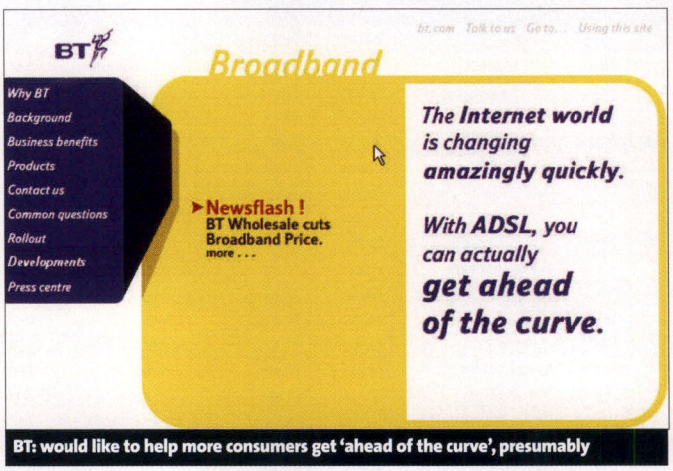
One of the new systems BT is trialling for super-fast Web connections means an engineer will still have to come round to install a plate which can be put onto your phone socket – you can install the modem yourself. But most of the problems associated with BT's roll-out of broadband have concerned the rather lengthy time it takes an engineer to visit your home.

However, the company is shortly to trial a second method whereby you can plug a device known as a 'microfilter' into your phone socket. This will split phone and data streams and BT reckons such a system could be launched by the end of the year. You also should be able to download any software you need online, as with setting up a conventional ISP.

BT will still have to make sure everything is set up at the exchange end of the system, and this is where the system might end up falling flat on its face, though at least you won't have to pay the current £150 installation charge.

BT has also attempted to kick-start broadband by cutting wholesale prices for ADSL connections to £30. This won't have a direct effect on you as a consumer, but it will enable other ISPs to make broadband more cost-effective. BT Wholesale looks after the sale of connections to ISPs – the providers have to buy a line from BT in order to connect you to broadband.

However, many ISPs have rejected the cut. Thus, owners of Demon Internet, called the price cut 'too little, too late'.



BT: would like to help more consumers get 'ahead of the curve', presumably

Broadband roll-out problems? It's not just us, you know...

For once it's not the UK which is having problems with broadband access, it's Japan. Yahoo! Japan (***www.yahoo.co.jp***) has delayed the launch of its broadband service, known as Yahoo! BB, as it is concerned about the service's reliability.

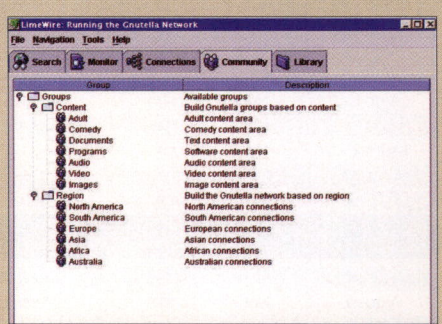
The service is a partnership between Yahoo! Japan and the Nippon Telegraph & Telephone (NTT) company. Yahoo! Japan says the offer has received a large number of subscribers; some Japanese media reports say it has only connected 10,000 out of the planned 200,000 users it predicted at launch. It seems that NTT has experienced problems building the infrastructure necessary to launch a broadband service.

NET-FRIENDLY PACKAGES AND DOWNLOADS

THIS MONTH'S TOP SOFTWARE »

Napster, as we all now know, is something of a spent force as far as file-sharing is concerned: its new model, to be unveiled shortly, will involve downloads rather than peer-to-peer networking. But that's not to say that file-sharing is a spent force – in fact, there are a whole host of applications ready to link your computer to someone else's at the click of a button.

LimeWire (***www.limewire.com***) is a software application that allows you to share files on the Gnutella Network. Gnutella is what's called an 'open protocol', which means any individual or company can create new applications to run on the network, or put new content onto it, unlike Napster which was a closed network. This means that, effectively, nobody has control over the network. The LimeWire software works in a very similar way to Napster but lets users search for and share any type of computer files, so you can share anything from a piece of audio to an online game. The latest version (1.6) will also let you resume a broken download and see the speed of the other computer you are sharing with.



Audiogalaxy Satellite (***www.audiogalaxy.com***) is another file-sharing application, this time dedicated to MP3s. Again, it will let you resume broken downloads and search for MP3s. Indeed, we've found some pretty obscure stuff on there, and what's more the software isn't too power hungry on your computer. You can search for tracks by artist or album, and download the song onto your computer. It will automatically select the closest user that has the song for speedier downloads. You can even select files which are not currently online and download them when they are available.

iMesh (***www.imesh.com***) is a tool similar to LimeWire which allows you to download files from up to seven users at a time. The network has seven million users. Like the Gnutella network, iMesh operates without a central server and includes a history file detailing all the uploads you have made. As with the other file-sharing applications, you share files with other users as you're downloading the files you want. iMesh also allows you to 'hop' between users if one goes offline. If you go offline at any point, the software will resume the download when you go back online. Napster is dead – long live its heirs...

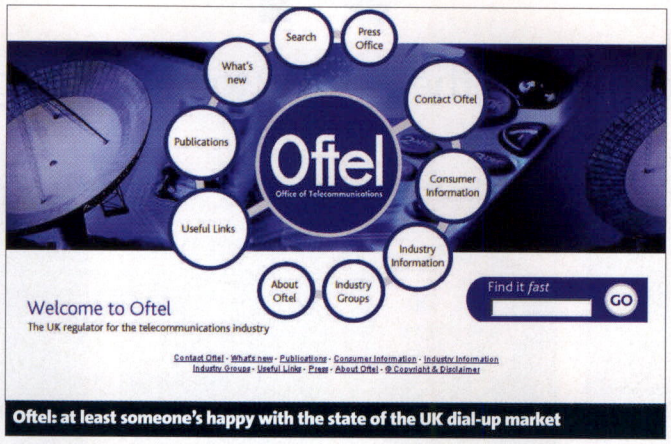
ISP market in good shape

Or so says Oftel. After all, dial-up accounts cost less here than in Germany...

Oftel claims competition between ISPs is healthy and that customers are enjoying better access than ever to a wide range of Internet services at competitive prices.

Ten million households in the UK now have dial-up access to the Net, a marked improvement on six million a year ago. But it's in the unmetered access market that subscribers are growing at incredible rates – unmetered dial-up is used by 80 percent of residential users as well as 60 percent of all small businesses, according to the UK telecom watchdog.

The costs involved compare favourably with the US: Oftel (***www.oftel.gov.uk***) estimates the monthly cost of unmetered Internet access for a UK-based heavy user is £18 per month compared to £19 in California. And it's a full £20 cheaper than a heavy unmetered user's monthly bill in Germany. But Oftel does say that consumers are still concerned at the level of service they are receiving.



Oftel: at least someone's happy with the state of the UK dial-up market

This doesn't hide the fact that only a small percentage of users are enjoying broadband. But even in the US only 2.5 percent of home users have ADSL or cable access. An Oftel survey in January found that UK ADSL users paid 20 percent more than their US counterparts.

ic24 sold at bargain basement price

Newspaper group Trinity Mirror has sold ISP ic24 (***www.ic24.net***) for £4.5 million. The purchaser, investment company Brightview Ltd, has bought up the ISP's 244,000 active users.

The popular ISP was put on the market earlier this year when it was thought the service could be sold for as much as £25 million, with telecoms giant Tiscali a rumoured buyer. Trinity Mirror has made a determined effort to cut its online business, axing icShowbiz.com just weeks after its launch amid a flurry of expensive TV and radio ads.

Brightview also bought up the users of ISP Totalise earlier this year for £1.48 million.

MS and AOL square up

AOL: not amused at Microsoft 'pulling back from earlier openness'

AOL and Microsoft are squaring up for a global row over whose icons can appear in Windows XP.

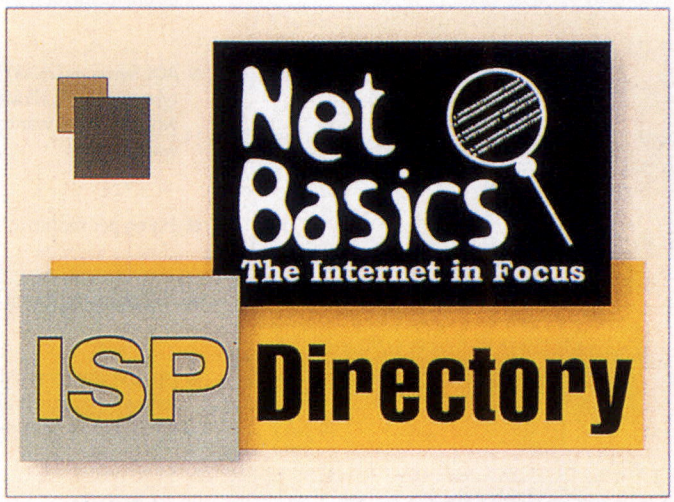
After originally saying that computer manufacturers could add their own ISP icons to the new version of Windows, Microsoft has now added a condition: third parties can have their icons added, but only if MSN Internet access is included too.

Microsoft had originally announced its intention to 'open up' the desktop of the forthcoming Windows XP to third party icons following the recent US Court of Appeals ruling that it was acting as a monopoly.

Bill Gates's computer giant changed its mind after AOL and Compaq struck a deal that AOL would have its ISP service included on every new Compaq machine.

AOL Tim Warner vice-president John Buckley said Microsoft was 'heading back to the rigid stance that has been slapped down by the second-highest court in the land'.

Microsoft hit back by claiming AOL was using the opportunity to push competing Microsoft products from the desktop. Spokesman Vivek Varma said the company was paying manufacturers 'to strip out access to our technology.'



Blow through the mist surrounding Internet Service Provision with desktop software designed by NetBasics, the leading ISP industry research organisation.

The ISP Directory features over 100 key facts and pricing information for nearly 200 UK ISPs including every industry leader.

For further info, visit:
www.netbasics.com

Net Basics™
The Internet in Focus

NetBasics, The Internet in Focus
info@netbasics.com
Telephone 0113 246 0009 in the UK

Which type of ISP

Each month, we recommend the best ISP for five average Internet users

HEAVY EVENINGS AND WEEKENDS USER

HOME WORKER

OUR USERS »	HEAVY EVENINGS AND WEEKENDS USER	HOME WORKER
TYPE OF USER AND SURFING HABITS	Heavy evenings and weekends users are likely to download applications and perhaps the odd MP3 or two, and this means that they can often be online for long periods of time.	Home workers are likely to be sending emails with large reports or other documents attached. They're also likely to want to be permanently online with a fast connection.
BEST TARIFF AND CHOICE OF ISP	**AOL (*www.aol.co.uk*) is an ideal package for this type of use – it allows you to go on the Net whenever you want and for however long you want, too.**	**If you have cable near you, then try services from either NTL or Telewest , the cable operators who've joined forces to promote broadband (*www.broadband-cable.co.uk*).**
HOW MUCH IT COSTS	£14.99 per month including all calls.	£24.99 per month.
PRICE OF ISP HELPLINE	**Freephone technical support.**	**Freephone technical support.**
WHAT DO YOU GET?	Up to seven email addresses plus tailored content with channels and other facilities for the whole family. Includes a parental control facility.	At nearly 10 times faster than traditional dial-up modems, you'll get always-on Internet which means you can do business or download information whenever you need to.
SUMMARY	**AOL is a reliable and well-regarded ISP which delivers a consistent level of service: its added extras and family-friendly features make it an ideal choice for the heavy surfer.**	**An installation fee may apply, and you'll probably have to subscribe to your chosen operator's other packages but it's a good value service and you can watch more TV, too.**

IF YOU'RE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR A new ISP the chances are you'll be confused about the huge variety of providers as well as the tariffs they offer. The world of ISPs is a minefield even experienced users still struggle to negotiate.

It's a good idea to compare the services of several ISPs before you sign up. The first thing to do is decide what kind of service you want from your ISP. That's why we've created the table above, so you can decide which type of user you are and what type of service might suit you best.

Bear in mind that there are far more ISPs than you might think. An ISP with a big marketing budget might well stick in your mind, but there are plenty of other providers that might suit your needs better.

Another important thing to remember is that more and more ISPs are offering a bigger variety of different services and tariffs. For example, one ISP might offer an unlimited dial-up service, an evenings and weekends service, a 'pay as you go' service and maybe even super-fast ADSL.

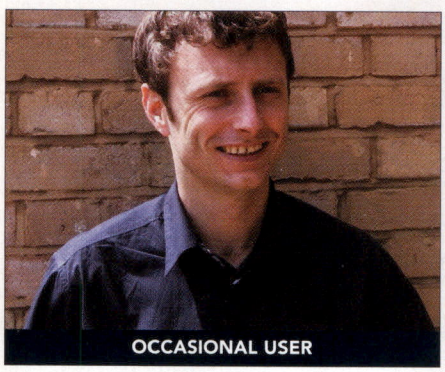
While we might be able to split a list of ISPs into just a few groups, that doesn't mean to say that they don't also offer other services that might fit into another group. This is especially the case with the large, well-known ISPs such as BTinternet (***www.btinternet.com***) or Freeserve (***www.freeserve.com***).

BTinternet: large and well-known

Another good idea is to ask around. What kind of service have your friends or colleagues had from their ISPs? If you've been told an ISP is good, visit its Web site and look at the services they offer. Do they fit with your requirements? Very often word of mouth is how many ISPs thrive or dive. Checking user reviews on the likes of ISP Review (***www.ispreview.co.uk***) is a good way

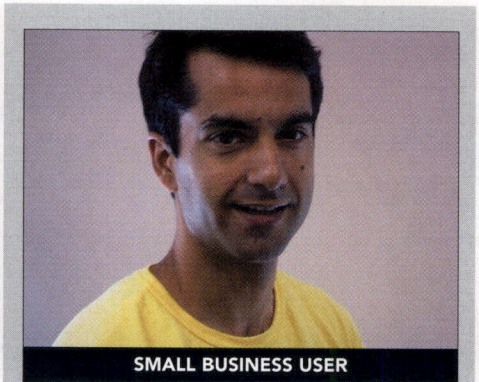
is best for you?

and explain the most common tariffs and packages available



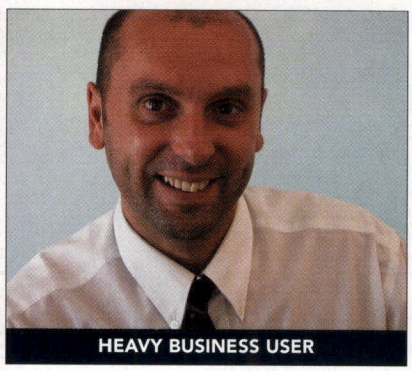
OCCASIONAL USER

- Probably likely only to want to dial up and check their email perhaps once a week. They might also want to look at the odd Web site they've read about in a magazine.
- **There are plenty of ISPs to choose from, including SniffOut (*www.sniffout.net*), the top ranking ISP in our test this month – see p110 for a whole list of 'No monthly subscription' ISPs.**
- 'Pay as you go' with local rate phone charges.
- **Depending on the ISP, can be up to £1 a minute.**
- Most non-subscription ISPs will give you unlimited email addresses, although this will vary. Many of these ISPs also have a portal with basic news and other information.
- **A light user would be silly to pay a subscription charge, so you might as well choose a tariff with only local call costs. Because you'll have no ties, you can also change ISPs very easily.**



SMALL BUSINESS USER

- A small business user is likely to need a reliable connection so that email can be checked several times a day and employees can connect to the Web with no problems.
- **This month we've chosen Nildram (*www.nildram.net*), which offers a variety of packages for the business user.**
- Low user dial-up is £15 per quarter.
- **National rate, 8am to 9pm.**
- This low-user account is really only for a business that needs to receive email and look at the occasional Web site – ideal for seeing what your competitors are up to!
- **Nildram would suit the needs of our small business well, as it is an adaptable ISP whose level of service can grow with the business – the business could even host a site with Nildram.**



HEAVY BUSINESS USER

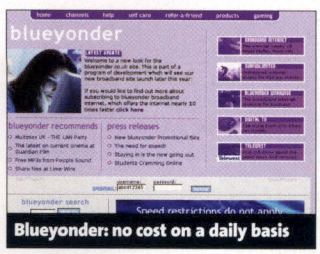
- Heavy business users will need a permanent, always-on connection plus access to a variety of email accounts. They may also be planning their own, integrated, Web site.
- **We chose ADSL from Netscalibur (*www.netscalibur.co.uk*), the business ISP which recently took over DirectConnection. The company also provides hosting.**
- The service starts at £138 per year.
- **24/7 telephone support service desk.**
- You get 10 email addresses, a domain name, email forwarding, access to Netscalibur's news server and emergency support if you have any problems.
- **A large business will need a solution that's not going to fail them or their customers. If anything does go wrong, you need to make sure that the support is comprehensive.**

to gauge whether certain ISPs have garnered complaints or praise from ordinary punters.

TYPES OF ISP

No monthly subscription

You don't pay the ISP directly, but instead when you connect to the Net, you pay the cost of a phone call. This is usually local rate (an 0345 or 0845 number). Non-subscription ISPs earn money by taking a cut of the money you pay on your call – effectively selling your custom on to whoever provides your line.



Blueyonder: no cost on a daily basis

Monthly subscription

As the title suggests, this type of ISP charges you a monthly fee to use its services. There are several types of monthly subscription ISPs so it's a good idea to make sure you know exactly what you'll be getting for your money before you sign up.

Some ISPs such as Blueyonder (***www.blueyonder.co.uk***) and AOL (***www.aol.co.uk***) charge a monthly fee and then make no charge for connection to the Internet. Others make a charge but stipulate when you can connect for free (usually evenings and weekends). BT offers such a service, as does Freeserve.

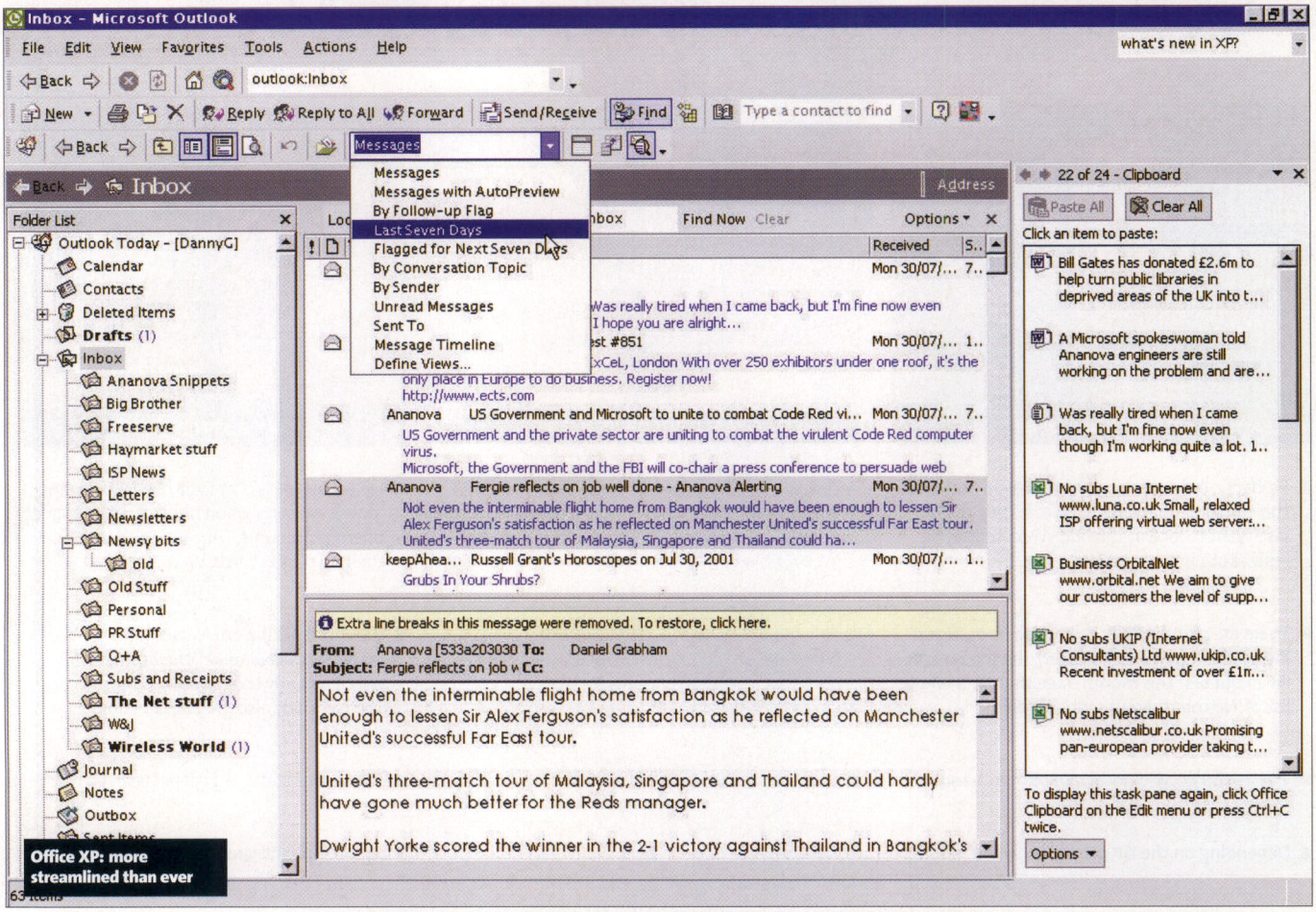
Others such as Demon (***www.demon.net***) and BTInternet (***www.btinternet.com***) charge for a local rate dial-up account which works in the same way as those without a monthly subscription. What you're paying for is the quality of the service – you'll almost certainly have no connection problems.

TOP TIP

Always read the small print in your contract before signing up with an ISP – clauses which allow rapid price changes should immediately be questioned. If you have doubts, call the ISP and clarify the matter.

Is Office XP for you?

Microsoft Office has been upgraded to the all-singing XP. But is Bill Gates's new tool up to the job?

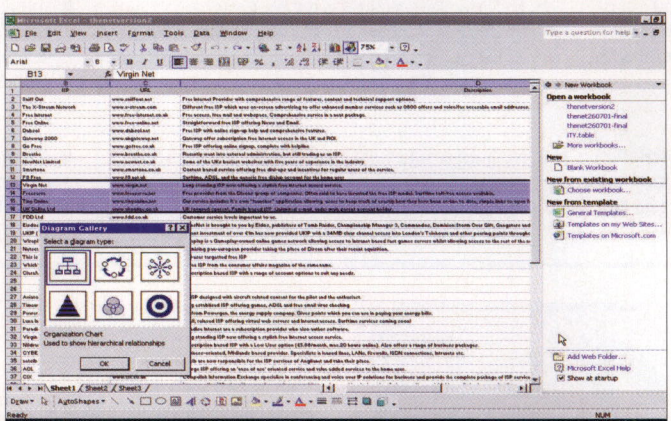


Office XP: more streamlined than ever

FROM AN INTERNET PERSPECTIVE, the most noticeable thing about the newly-released and much-heralded Office XP – essentially an update of Microsoft Office which its creators have been trumpeting as a revolutionary new business operating system – is the absence of Microsoft's Web page creation package FrontPage in the lower end versions of the software suite. The lack of FrontPage in the basic versions (Professional and Standard) is disappointing as, while it's not as powerful as Macromedia's Dreamweaver (***www.macromedia.com***), it is unbelievably easy to use, boasting the same useability and controls as Word. So theoretically, anybody with Word experience can create HTML pages.

Microsoft will tell you that creating Web pages with Word itself is easy. Indeed, it can be done, but the package doesn't offer the complete flexibility you need from a page building package. The fact that it's included in the Developer edition is strange, as Microsoft would surely be better off just throwing in FrontPage for budding site builders.

The box is the second disappointment. If you're not familiar with Office, you can take a tour through the package using the CD-Rom supplied, but the only documentation supplied is a rather lightweight cull of key topics from *Microsoft Office XP Inside Out*, available from a bookshop near you. When you're paying a not inconsiderable sum, you at least expect a half-decent manual to put on your bookshelf.


Excellent Excel: the new Office XP allows seamless intergration between documents

INTEGRATION IS KEY

The key to XP is integration and this theme is most noticeable in Outlook. There's complete integration between Outlook and other Microsoft services such as Hotmail and MSN Messenger – you can choose to Instant Message email contacts or move emails between your Hotmail and fixed accounts. You can also bring in other email accounts, so you could even collect your home email at work. You can even send email through your Hotmail account from your Outlook interface, useful for any work-time Hotmail addicts.

One of the best new features, though, is the ability to schedule meetings for a whole office, or arrange meetings or appointments across a network using Outlook.

You can also choose to have Outlook block several types of documents – including .exe and .vbs files – that might carry viruses. It seemed

Office XP: will take you where you want to go today – wherever that may be

for a long time that Microsoft were going to block all attachments as standard through Outlook. Instead, it is left up to the individual user. It's also likely that many network users will find attachments blocked in the future to stop the spread of viruses within companies.

You can even send email through Hotmail from Outlook...

A WORD IN YOUR EAR

Staple application Microsoft Word is more refined than ever and allows you to switch off any automatic formatting through a series of 'Smart Tags', so it's less annoying, too. One of the worst things about past versions of Word (95 onwards) was that the program pretended it could do everything for you. XP develops this so that users can do what they want without being pestered if they wish.

When the application alters anything from a date to the capitalisation of a first letter, it will also briefly bring up a box (the Smart Tag) which, when clicked, will produce a menu allowing you to switch off just that instance of formatting – or switch the feature off completely. It's representative of this unobtrusiveness that the famously irksome paperclip-man Office Assistant is switched off by default. Smart Tags also allow you to do other things – a name in Word can be linked through to an Outlook contact so you can send them an email and likewise a meeting can be scheduled, too.

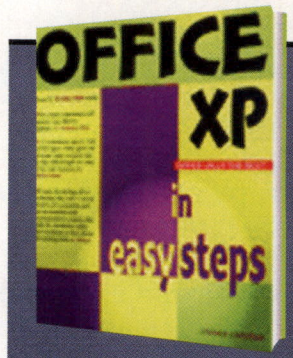
The clipboard is also more user friendly – you can actually see what's on the clipboard and click on the item you want. The clipboard appears in all applications as an extra clickable task panel at the side of the screen. There's also a variety of extremely handy new task panels in the suite, including one that opens every time you start an application with a list of the most recently opened documents.

BETTER USEABILITY

Document recovery is also more advanced (and more reliable) in XP, allowing you to return to the last saved document, or offering up the version present when the computer crashed. There are also new tools so a variety of users can work on the same document (Document Collaboration). They can edit the document at the same time and merge the documents together. Word will then automatically compare the documents and mark the alterations from different users. Users can also annotate different points in a document, too.

The theme of increased useability is continued with the other basic applications, Excel, PowerPoint and Access, which all boast the same useability features. The applications also have a clever trick whereby you can paste in a table from the Net (e.g. a share price) which you can then set to automatically update. So, if you're creating a PowerPoint presentation, you can use accurate, up to the second data. This is typical of Microsoft's .NET vision for communication and data sharing online.

FOR MORE INFORMATION on Office XP visit Microsoft's Office Web site at *www.microsoft.com/uk/office*



Win one of 10 copies of Office XP in Easy Steps

We've got 10 copies of *Office XP In Easy Steps*, the best guide to the new application currently in print, to give away. To enter simply email *thenetnow@haynet.com* with the answer to this simple question about Office XP:

Which version of Office XP includes FrontPage?
(a) Professional
(b) Standard
(c) Developer

To send your answer by post, send it on the back of an envelope or postcard to: the net/Office XP, 38-42 Hampton Road, Teddington, Middlesex, TW11 0JE. Closing date for entries is 3 October 2001. The first 10 correct answers chosen at random will be sent the prizes. The editor's decision is final.

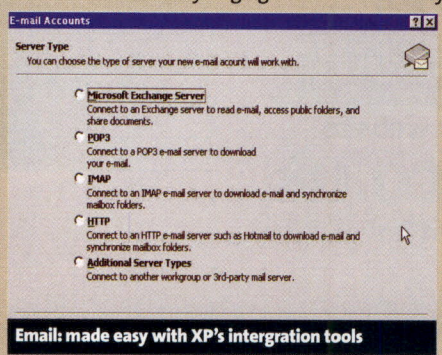
'IT REALLY IS A SUPERB PACKAGE...'

OUR VERDICT ON OFFICE XP

Of course, XP has far more new features than we've had space to outline here. But we have relayed the main points, so if these don't appeal to you then think twice about upgrading, especially if you're using a version of Office purchased in the past two or three years.

You can upgrade to XP for just under £200; it really is a superb package and worth every penny. But if you've never owned a copy of Office before, you'll have nothing to upgrade from, so you'll have to fork out just over £400. After all, the tweaks incorporated into the newest version of Outlook (separately known as Outlook 2002) are the best part of the jigsaw, but you'll probably find that many of the email-related features will creep into Outlook Express soon enough. Still, if you would like to have a copy of the best life-arranger available, it can be bought separately for just under £100.

A lot has been made of Microsoft's new plans for registration of Office XP. The basic premise is that instead of optionally registering by post or email you have to register either online or by ringing a hotline. We tried the freephone service and, while you don't have to give any personal details whatsoever, if you do decide to leave your details you can also opt to be 'kept notified' of product updates – therefore giving Bill a database of people who buy his product. But it really isn't as big a deal as some have made out and there is the small matter of Microsoft wanting to cut down on illegal copies of Office floating about.



Email: made easy with XP's intergration tools

The company's own estimates say that perhaps as many as 84 percent of all copies of Office currently in circulation are illegal, especially within an office environment where a single-user copy may previously have been installed on a variety of machines. Now, that will not be able to happen. The only downside is that you'll have to re-register if you need to reformat your hard drive, but unless you're a real PC enthusiast you'll probably never need to do it anyway. So consider taking the plunge and handing Gatesy your cash...

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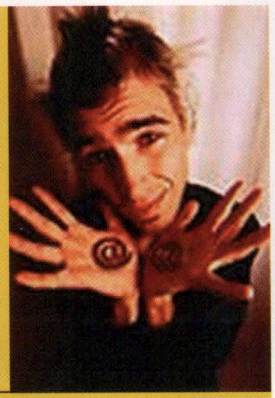

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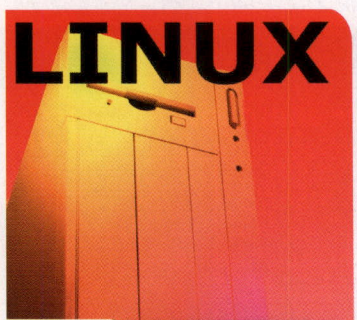

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:// Famous fans of the Web tell all

Nick Ross

The *Crimewatch UK* presenter on Internet crime, design and why the Web's a bit like a big telephone

When did you discover the Internet and what it offered?

I can't remember! But I can remember thinking it wasn't much more sophisticated than a fax machine. I always assumed it would be less revolutionary than the telephone, and I think I was right because we forget how the telephone revolutionised the world. I think the Net is a very clever extension of the phone, but it will be the second-generation Net that makes a difference, not just in quantity but in quality, when there's a massive computing power linked together. At the moment it speeds up processes I could do before.

You've got your own personal site (*www.nickross.co.uk*). Why's that?

It has two purposes, really. One is that, because I'm freelance, it's simply a point of contact. The second is because I get an awful lot of correspondence and I don't want people writing to me for photos and things like that, so it's a very simple way of directing people to the right place: I can now say 'just look at the site.'

It's a very smart site; we particularly like the use of a virtual filing system with tabs for navigation. Were you involved in the design?

Yes. It was created before there was as much literacy as there is now about how to navigate your way around sites. I wanted something that was both interesting to use and intuitive for somebody who wasn't good at navigating their way around.

Have you seen the Internet used in crime investigation?

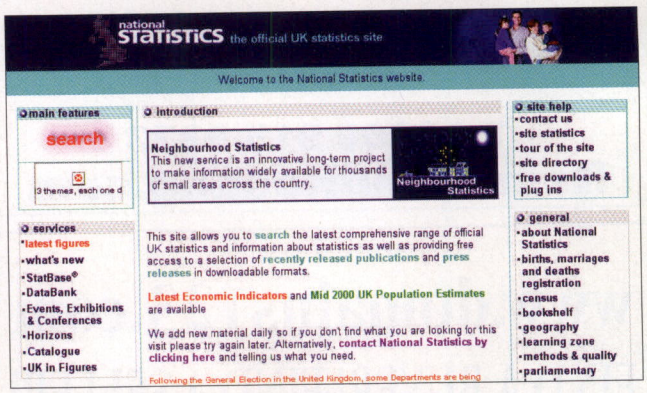
Well, of course, the police use the Internet (as do other investigating agencies), although they're rather backward in a lot of Internet technology, simply because their budgets are so poor. Crime, of course, is just another form of entrepreneurship, and the Net itself is breeding all sorts of new crime. At the moment I suspect the Net is more use in promoting crime than it is in resolving it.

You've helped to create the Jill Dando Institute of Crime Science at University College, London. How will the Net be used there?

It's certainly part of the strategy to have an important Internet presence which could serve large numbers of other academic institutions, police, local government and so forth, who are looking for ways of reducing crime. But the sort of process we'd like to create is very costly.

INTERVIEW: ALEX NEWBY

NICK'S BEST OF THE WEB



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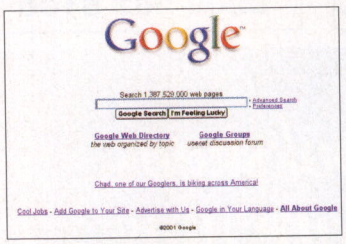

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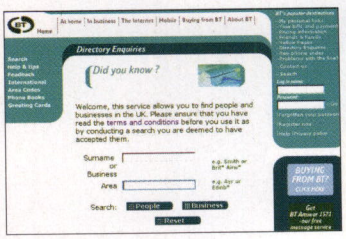

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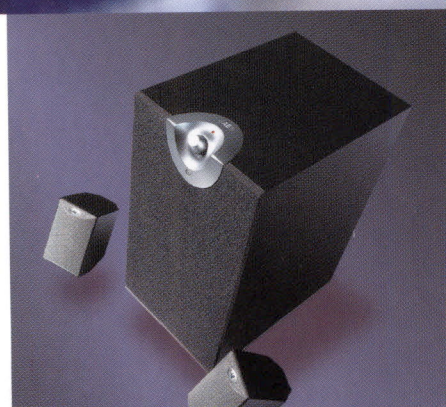

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